

How do Syrian refugee women seek and find work? A feminist grounded analysis of work integration experiences in Canada

by
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Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the examining committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

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Author's Declaration

This thesis consists of material all of which I authored or co-authored: see Statement of Contributions included in the thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Statement of Contributions

This thesis consists in part of three manuscripts that have been submitted or are under review.

Exceptions to sole authorship:

Chapter 3: Senthana, S., MacEachen, E., Premji, S., & Bigelow, P. “Can someone help me?” Refugee women’s experiences of using settlement agencies to find work in Canada. Under Review in Journal of International Migration and Integration [JIMI-D-19-00059].

Chapter 4: Senthana, S., MacEachen, E., Premji, S., & Bigelow, P. Employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women arriving through Canada’s varied refugee protection programs. Under Review in Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies [CJMS-2019-0207].

Chapter 5: Senthana, S., MacEachen, E., Premji, S., & Bigelow, P. Entrepreneurial experiences of Syrian refugee women in Canada: A feminist grounded qualitative study. Submitted to Special Issue in the Journal of Small Business Economics.

As lead author of these three chapters, I was responsible for conceptualizing the study design, data collection, data analysis, and drafting and submitting manuscripts. My co-authors provided guidance during each step of the research and provided feedback on draft manuscripts.

Under Dr. MacEachen’s supervision, I also prepared the remaining chapters in this thesis, which were not written for publication.

Abstract

Close to 58,000 Syrian refugees have resettled in Canada since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Half of these are women. When guaranteed income supports cease (provided for up to one year by governments and private sponsorship groups), the women need to become self-sufficient by seeking out and securing employment. However, labor market barriers, including lack of language proficiency, Canadian work experience, discrimination, and credential recognition often intersect to impede integration into safe and decent work. Much of the research on labour market barriers has homogenized the experience of other immigrants with refugees and to date, there is limited understanding of employment experiences of refugee women in particular. In addition, few studies have examined conditions outside of labour market barriers that may shape employment experiences.

This dissertation research utilized a qualitative research design guided by feminist grounded theory to examine Syrian refugee women's experience of seeking and finding employment in Canada. Briefly, the objectives of this research were: to explore women's employment integration process, identify challenges to securing employment, the influence of settlement policy and programming in shaping the women's employment, to understand changing gender roles, and to identify potential avenues and strategies to promote employment integration. Three manuscripts addressed these objectives drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 Syrian refugee women arriving through four resettlement streams and 9 key informants working in the settlement agency sector.

Findings revealed how the women experienced multiple and intersecting conditions and barriers that pushed them into low-waged, low-skilled, precarious positions in informal and feminized sectors. The settlement stream through which refugees enter Canada, the influence of

settlement agencies, the women's gender and family role, social support networks, navigating a new economic context, and whether the women arrived with certain skills (e.g. language) and resources are examples of conditions that facilitated or hindered employment opportunities.

Drawing on these conditions, a new framework is proposed to understand employment integration of refugees in Canada. This framework highlights common pathways to employment and points to area for improvement and recommendation to help mediate challenges and promote a positive resettlement experience for all refugees.

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List of Abbreviations

CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
BVOR	Blended visa office-referred
GAR	Government-assisted refugee
IRCC	Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada
PSR	Privately sponsored refugee
RC	Refugee claimant
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Chapter 1

Introduction

At the end of 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported the highest number of displaced people since the end of World War II (UNHCR, 2015). Of the 59.5 million displaced persons, the majority (about two-thirds) were internally displaced, 14.4 fled to neighbouring countries and a small fraction, 105,200, were admitted for resettlement to third countries (UNHCR, 2015). The United States accepted 60 per cent intake (66,500) while Canada took in 20,000 followed by Australia (9,400) and Norway (2,400). More recently, the Canadian government expanded their refugee protection program to accept 58,600 Syrian refugees between November 2015 and August 2018 amidst the Syrian refugee crisis (IRCC, 2018).

Equal numbers of males and females have been admitted, most coming through the government-assisted stream followed by private sponsorship and the blended visa-referral program. When guaranteed income supports end, employment becomes critical to financial security. Yet, common barriers and challenges to employment such as lack of language proficiency (Chiswick and Miller, 2003; Tilbury and Colic-Peisker, 2007), non-recognition of foreign credentials (Krahn et al., 2000; Sienkiewicz et al., 2013), and discrimination impede their integration (Reitz and Banerjee, 2007; Oreopoulos, 2003) with women encountering these barriers more acutely than refugee males (Salaff and Greve, 2003; Hudon, 2015). Possible reasons for this lie at the women's inexperience in the workforce (Franz, 2003) or gender roles. Particularly, women are often occupied with domestic responsibilities and must then negotiate their domestic role with employment, which may push them to take on precarious positions that are not commensurate with their background (Suto, 2009; Wilkinson, Garcea, and Bucklaschuk, 2015).

Current policy and practice around settlement and particularly employment integration does not consider women's multiple and competing roles. For instance, employment programs offered through settlement agencies typically require a qualification (e.g. bachelor's degree) to participate and refugee women rarely meet these criteria. Lack of transportation and childcare duties may also prevent their ability to attend programming. To circumvent these challenges, refugee women may seek volunteer work; however, they are disappointed when this does not lead to paid employment (Tastsoglou and Miedema, 2005). While previous research has addressed refugees' labour market barriers and evaluated, to some extent, policy and practice in place to assist in employment integration, limited evidence exists that examines refugee women's experience. Especially in the domain of employment, previous research has combined women's experiences with that of their male counterparts or with other immigrant women.

The Syrian refugee crisis has brought in the largest influx of refugees to Canada since the Vietnamese in the mid-80s. Half of these refugees are women who have arrived through different resettlement streams and with different family compositions, training and education, and prior work experience (IRCC, 2018). The permanence of their resettlement suggests that many will seek work to support themselves and their family in their new home.

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to examine the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women in Canada. This study addresses the intersections of immigrant status, gender, and work from the perspectives of refugee women and key informants who work closely with newcomer populations. An understanding of this relationship is essential as Canada's annual influx of refugee's has doubled and employment will remain a priority for many resettled refugees.

1.1 Literature review

This literature review provides a comprehensive exploration of the existing research related to the topics of refugees, employment, and gender. I begin with key definitions intended to differentiate refugees from other immigrants in Canada. Following this, I orient readers to refugee labour market participation and key barriers and challenges to integration that are both endemic to refugees and immigrants or refugees alone. Policy and practice around settlement are discussed with a focus on employment practices that are meant to facilitate integration. Next, the Syrian refugee crisis is described, providing the basis for its origins and consequences which provides context for their focus in this dissertation. Gender overlies all sections of the literature review to highlight the gender inequity in labour force participation of refugees, gendered experiences of barriers and challenges influencing employment, as well as the associations of gender and employment, both in and out of the home. The review concludes with a synthesis of key topics and identified gaps which informed the research questions and objectives for this dissertation.

1.2 Key definitions and scope

The overarching aim of this dissertation research was to examine the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women in Canada. The refugee category falls under the umbrella term of immigrants although clear distinctions between refugees and other immigrants exist. The following section is intended to clarify these distinctions.

The United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees formally defines a refugee as someone who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UN General Assembly, 1951). Meeting this definition involves a

formal process in order to determine eligibility. As well individuals need to be referred from either the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a designated referral organization, or a private sponsorship group to resettle in Canada through the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program. To be referred, refugees must fall into one of two refugee classes seeking protection from *outside* Canada: convention refugee abroad class¹ or country of asylum class². These individuals are considered permanent residents when they arrive (Government of Canada, 2016) and thus have access to federal supports and services and are able to work.

A second program, the In-Canada Asylum Program, is dedicated to refugees who make claims *within* Canada or at one of Canada's borders. These refugees are refugee claimants and are considered temporary residents while their claim is being considered by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) (Government of Canada, 2016). While refugee claimants are not eligible for most social programs, they are given work permits while they wait for their case to be determined (Vineberg, 2018). Refugee claimants with an accepted claim receive a "protected person" status and can make an application for permanent residency in Canada while those rejected either leave or can apply for a judicial review of the decision (Government of Canada, 2016).

Unlike refugees, other immigrant categories have not had to forcibly leave their home country for reasons such as civil war but rather willingly leave in search of better opportunities. While it is out of the scope of this dissertation to consider the multiple categories of other

¹ Persons in the Convention Refugee Abroad Class must be outside their home country and cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Individuals must also have no reasonable prospect such as voluntary repatriation in their home country, resettlement in their country of asylum or to a third country.

² Persons in the Country of Asylum Class have left their home because they are seriously or personally affected by civil war or human rights violations.

immigrants (e.g. skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial or territorial nominees, live-in caregivers, Canadian experience class), these individuals typically share common characteristics. Particularly, these immigrants often possess skills and experience needed in the Canadian labour market and so can integrate quickly and some may have a job waiting for them when they arrive (Bowel and Perry, 2013).

As mentioned, refugees were the focus of this dissertation research. Accordingly, throughout the dissertation, a reference to refugee will align with the prescribed definition above while reference to other immigrants is broader given the multiple categories.

1.3 Refugee labour market integration

Upon arrival in Canada, refugees need to seek and secure employment to support themselves and family. When considering their labour market integration, existing studies generally point to the existence of a sizeable gap between refugees and immigrants. Particularly, the employment rate is consistently low among refugees (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2012) and their earning potential typically does not converge with other immigrants until nearly a decade after arrival (Abbott and Beach, 2011). Thus, many refugees may resort to social assistance to help with the cost of living (DeVoretz, Pivnenko, and Beiser, 2004), further delaying their employment integration and growing the gap in labour outcomes with other immigrant classes.

Within the literature on refugee labour market integration, gender has been found to play a major role in shaping economic adaptation (Miletic, 2014). Refugee women gain a sense of identity from their employment (Brigham, 2011), especially as income earners, and gain financial security (Suto, 2009). However, they are more likely to be unemployed when compared to refugee males or female immigrants and tend to cluster in female-dominated sectors with lower earnings (Hudon, 2015; Picot, Zhang, and Hou, 2019). As well, positions are typically

precarious (e.g. part-time, temporary) and are not commensurate with their education, skills, or experience (Krahn, 2000; Wilkinson, Garcea, and Bucklaschuk, 2015). Recent census data found that among refugees who landed between 2002 and 2005, roughly 20% held college or university certification and 7 years after arrival, the number of refugees participating in post-secondary training grew substantially (Prokopenko, 2018).

This gendered-immigrant gap is persistent outside of the Canadian labour market, in the US (Potocky-Tripodi, 2003; Siraj, 2007; Codell et al., 2011), Sweden (Bevelander, Hagstrom, and Ronnqvist, 2009) and Australia (Ibrahim, Sgro, Mansouri, and Jubb, 2010) and is shaped by a variety of factors.

1.3.1 Barriers and challenges to employment integration

Existing literature on employment integration points to common barriers and challenges refugees encounter when seeking work. These barriers include lack of language proficiency, non-recognition of foreign credentials, social support networks, and the role of settlement agencies. While the first three extend across refugees and other immigrants, social support has begun to emerge as disproportionately affecting refugees more than immigrants. Settlement agencies are also included as a structural barrier because they can perpetuate deskilled employment.

A. Language proficiency

Language comprehension is an important predictor of employment integration (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; Potocky-Tripodi, 2003; Sienkiewicz et al., 2013). Unlike other immigrants who enter knowing at least one of Canada's official languages (80 percent), only 30 per cent of incoming refugees are proficient (Wilkinson and Garcea, 2017). Within the recent Syrian refugee cohort, language proficiency is concerning, with a mere 10 per cent of arriving refugees able to speak English or French (Munson and Ataullahjan, 2016).

Refugees with lower levels of English proficiency are not only less likely to be employed but are less desirable to employers than individuals with weaker credentials but some English proficiency (Sienkiewicz et al., 2013). In their study of Yugoslavian and Middle Eastern refugees, Tilbury and Colic-Peisker (2007) found that employers acknowledged a lack of communication skills and inability to interact with other staff or clients prevented hiring of refugees with poor language skills.

Lack of language proficiency has also been tied to lower earnings and education. Some studies suggest that one-third of earnings decline is linked to poor language skills (Chiswick and Miller, 2003; Frenette and Morissette, 2003). Chiswick and Miller (2003), for example, highlight that, compared to immigrants who are able to conduct a conversation in an official language, earnings can be as low as 10 to 12 per cent less among immigrants who don't speak an official language, with the gap growing for refugees. Similarly, formal education is closely linked to predicting post-migration language fluency and likeliness to seek work (Hou and Beiser, 2006). In their study of East Asian refugees in Canada, Hou and Beiser (2006) found that 10 years after migrating, 32 per cent had good language skills and 60 per cent had moderate language skills, due in part to available opportunities and incentives including ESL classes. When gender intersects, refugee women may take longer to integrate into the labour market due to their limited exposure to English and lower levels of formal education when compared to their male counterparts and Canadian-born women (Hudon, 2015).

Opportunities to learn English may also prove difficult for newcomer women due to childcare responsibilities (Kilbride and Ali, 2010) and may limit employment to low-skilled and dangerous jobs (Fuller, 2011). Premji, Messing, and Lippel (2008) found that lack of language proficiency inhibited garment workers' access to occupational health and safety rights in their

workplace. As well, language training in the workplace has yielded mixed results, either beneficial or ineffective, however in most cases, it did not lead to advancement in higher positions (Harper, Pierce, and Burnaby, 1996; Premji, Messing, and Lippel, 2008).

B. Non-recognition of foreign credentials

Economic integration of immigrants and refugees are affected by whether or not an individual's education or credentials were earned in Canada. Those with foreign credentials may find it difficult to have them recognized by employers, preventing them from accessing jobs in line with their qualifications (Sienkiewicz et al., 2013). Evidence suggests that the underutilization of immigrant and refugee skills is equivalent to \$2 billion annually in lost earnings (Reitz, 2001). However, other immigrants still fare better when compared to refugees, with credential recognition doubling that of refugees (51% recognition rate versus 15% among refugees) (Houle and Yssaad, 2010). In these instances, refugees are unable to practice their occupation until they have met host country standards, which requires substantial time and money, leading refugees to pursue other employment opportunities (Guo, 2009). Among a sample of resettled refugees in Canada, 60 per cent took on blue collar positions upon arrival even though the majority held professional and managerial positions in their respective countries (Krahn et al., 2000). Credential recognition problems were frequently cited as barriers to work integration. Other factors such as lack of Canadian work experience are perpetuated by strict governance over foreign credentials and are tied to minimal career advancement and limited access to well-paying jobs (Guo, 2009).

Credentials of immigrant women are valued differently than those of men, making it more difficult for them to work in their previous employment sectors (Salaff and Greve, 2003). Employers' undervaluing experience gained outside North America is partially attributed to their

unfamiliarity with women's source country labour markets (Esses, Dietz, and Bhardwaj, 2006; Salaff and Greve, 2003). Li's (2001) study demonstrated that foreign credentials accounted for half of the income disparity among immigrants and Canadian-born degree holders and this gap grew with immigrant women. Similar findings were found among female nurses educated outside Canada although, a distinction between immigrant classes was not made (Buhr, 2010).

C. Social support networks

Social support networks have profound influences on the lives of refugees, acting as key sources of advice about employment (Beaman, 2011; Lamba, 2008). These networks typically begin with family and extend to peers, acquaintances, and professional contacts (Hanley et al., 2018). In their study on 525 refugees in Canada, for instance, Lamba and Krahm (2003) found that social support networks in the form of family and friends were important to assisting with employment and other settlement needs (e.g. finances, health). These findings paralleled more recent evidence from the UK (Cheung and Phillimore, 2014). However, social support networks are often analyzed along geographical lines (Ryan et al., 2008) and refugees lack these in their country of settlement (Hyndman, 2011) when compared to other immigrants who may base their decision to emigrate on place of residence of friends and family. As well, compared to males, refugee women have limited access to social support networks when language barriers intersect (Hao and Johnson, 2011; Hynie, Crooks, and Barragan, 2011). Thus, their networks may be limited to individuals in the same situation as them and within similar ethnic groups leading to similar employment outcomes in precarious and low-skilled positions (Allen, 2009).

D. Role of settlement agencies

Settlement agencies are government-funded community organizations that pass on knowledge, contacts and employment strategies and their goal is to provide assistance around settlement

needs. However, these agencies can hinder access to decent employment (Creese and Wiebe, 2009). For instance, employment programs designed for newcomers often result in uptake of work that is not in line with their education and with little to no follow-up on their employment outcome or experience (Creese, 2006; Kosny et al., 2017). For instance, Yanar et al. (2019) found that settlement staff used a ‘sales pitch’ with employers on the value of hiring newcomers. However, a formal follow-up process with both newcomer clients and employers was typically reserved for subsidized jobs (jobs that are paid in part by employers and in part through funding received by settlement agencies). In their study on immigrants and refugees in Toronto, Kosny et al. (2019) found that newcomers were hesitant to speak up about their health and safety concerns since the jobs they secured were leveraged through connections between agencies and employers and workers felt they needed to be grateful (Kosny et al., 2019).

High client workloads and funding constraints further construct programs. As well, they promote cheap labour and highlight women’s domestic responsibilities as their skills and experience (Creese and Wiebe, 2009). Evidence by Lee (1999) also suggests that settlement agencies may exploit newcomers by offering them volunteer positions at their organizations, for their gain, under the guise of gaining work experience. Finally, some research has even found that the discourse around “survival employment” may be linked to settlement agencies given their insistence on refugees accepting any job offered (Geddie, 2002). Survival employment is problematic given that immigrants may focus on survival jobs as a source of income and in doing so, less on their long-term careers and career development (Bauder, 2006).

The impact of these barriers on employment experience and outcome is still being established in the Canadian literature. Policy and practice is intended to facilitate employment

integration and associated challenges, although issues with support received and reach have been questioned.

1.4 Policy and Practice

Under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, refugees are accepted mainly to provide them with protection but also with the objectives of pursuing “the maximum social, cultural, and economic benefits of immigration” (IRPA, 2001, c.27). Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is the governing body which upholds the Act by managing and administering the resettlement programs that allow refugee entry as well as programs to integrate refugees.

This section provides an overview of the three resettlement streams – Government-Assisted Refugee Program, Private Sponsorship of Refugee Program, and the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program – through which refugees arrive. A detailed exploration of these programs and influence on employment is presented in Chapter 4.

A. Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) Program

Government-assisted refugees are convention refugees abroad whose initial resettlement in Canada is entirely supported by the federal government or the province of Quebec. CIC’s Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) provides GARs with income support “for up to one year or until a refugee becomes self-sufficient, whichever comes first” (Ahmad, 2016). RAP funds are typically used to cover start-up and ongoing costs and are guided by the prevailing provincial or territorial social assistance schemes in the refugee’s place of residence (Elgersma, 2015). As well, refugees are provided with immediate services which can include temporary accommodation, needs assessment, and port of entry and reception services.

B. Private Sponsorship of Refugee (PSR) Program

Privately sponsored refugees can include either convention refugees abroad or country of asylum class refugees who are identified and sponsored by incorporated groups with an on-going agreement with CIC (sponsorship agreement holders or SAHs), a group of five Canadians and/or permanent residents, or community sponsors (Elgersma, 2015). Sponsoring groups agree to assume all financial and social support and responsibility for refugees such as care, housing, and settlement assistance. Most PSRs are supported by incorporated groups and very few by groups of five Canadians or permanent residents (Hyndman, Payne, and Jimenez, 2017).

Private sponsorship is a unique program given that it operates in addition to the GAR program. The government allocates a cap on refugees to resettle each year and private sponsors have the opportunity to exceed this number by sponsoring refugees themselves (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2013).

C. Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program

Blended Visa is a partnership, cost-sharing program between the government and private sponsors which started in 2013. Refugees resettled under BVOR typically receive income support through RAP for six months and private sponsors for the remaining six months. While this program is partially privately sponsored, it still allows the government to fulfill its refugee acceptance commitments (Agrawal, 2018).

Unlike the above programs, refugees arriving as refugee claimants (recall these are individuals seeking refugee status within Canada and not from outside as others) are not received or supported by anyone when they arrive in Canada unless they have friends or family (Yu, Ouellet, and Warmington, 2007). Many must rely on word-of-mouth for information around where to go. As well, when compared to acceptance through other programs, the backlog of

refugee claimants is highest. In 2018, the IRB had 47,451 claims pending and had to process about 2000 claims a month but only a small fraction (about 7600) of claimants were accepted (Vineberg, 2018; Keung, 2019). Additionally, refugee claimants are excluded from participation in most federally funded programs such as language instruction, until a positive decision is rendered, although access to programming at the provincial and municipal level varies by province.

Alongside policy pertaining to acceptance and arrival to Canada, the CIC also funds settlement programs that help refugees adapt to their new life. The CIC primarily works with provinces and territories, service provider organizations, and a range of other partners (e.g. school boards) in delivering these services, free of charge, to newcomers (For a review of services and providers, see Shields and Praznik, 2018). For the purposes of this dissertation, we will focus on programs available across Canada and relevant to employment integration. As well, comparisons to other immigrant categories are highlighted to stress different needs of refugees and how programs may not be accommodating the needs.

Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada

Language instruction for newcomers to Canada (LINC) are classes that provide basic language training in English or French to newcomers at a comfortable frequency and pace (Wang and Truelove, 2003). The premise of LINC is to promote the development of authentic language use for the purpose of social, cultural, and economic integration and includes up to 7 levels (Hajer, Kaskens, and Stasiak, n.d.). Whereas CIC evaluation reports indicate LINC is having a positive impact on English language skills, in reality, problems have been noted with participation and advancement (Sturm, McBride, and Edgar, 2018). Particularly, there is low uptake of classes potentially due to issues with transportation or childcare, and advancing to higher levels is slow.

Learners may need to spend upwards of 1,000 hours to see real progress (CIC, 2010) which may be difficult with competing demands and lack of resources.

Immigrant Employment Councils

Immigrant employment councils (IEC) are community organizations that work to connect newcomers to employment that reflects their skills and knowledge. IECs coordinate with employers to help recruit, select, train, and retain newcomers and are available across 12 cities in Canada. While the effectiveness of IECs have not been formally evaluated, a few, including the Toronto Region IEC suggested that roughly 75% of individuals who received mentoring were able to find a job between 2016 and 2017 (TRIEC, 2017). However, participating newcomers normally held a bachelor's degree which suggests that accessibility may be limited, especially for refugees who typically have lower levels of educations than other immigrants.

The Foreign Credential Recognition Program

The foreign credential recognition program (FCRP) is the national body that works with and funds provincial and territorial governments and other organizations (e.g. regulatory bodies, credential assessment agencies) to help assess and recognize education and work experience acquired outside Canada. This process is largely decentralized (over 500 regulatory authorities) and employers also have the option of performing their own assessments. Compared to other immigrants, however, refugees face distinct challenges to assessing their qualifications including missing or partial documentation, inability to verify documentation with issuing institution, or incomplete/interrupted education (CICIC, 2017). FCRP therefore has begun to fund workshops with key stakeholders to strategize on recommendations and best practices that can be incorporated with refugee populations. An example of this is reviewing alternative documentation or evidence such as public lists of graduates (CICIC, 2017).

1.5 Syrian refugee crisis

In March 2011, following the brutal torture of Syrian schoolchildren who wrote an anti-regime slogan on a wall, a mass of protestors took to the streets in Homs and Damascus demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad for reasons of lack of freedom, economic downturns, and desire for a democratic regime (Danahar, 2013). The government responded with armed force, imprisoning and killing hundreds to thousands of people, eventually leading to a civil war that some label as “the worst humanitarian crisis of our time” (Ban, 2015).

By 2012, clear sectarian divisions emerged and the war was in full swing (Rodgers et al., 2016). Assad assembled a militarized front compromised mainly of the Syrian Armed Forces (Syria’s national army), the National Defense Force (made up of Alawites, same sect as Assad himself), and drawing in international support from Iran and Russia (Malantowicz, 2013). The opposition comprised varied rebel forces that rallied together to form the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and included the majority Sunni Arabs (make up 64% of Syrian population) and international support from US, UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan (AAISA, 2016; Phillips, 2015). Both groups have been criticized for using ethno-sectarian propaganda and fear to promote their agendas while claiming to stand for ‘the people’ and ‘Syria’. The opposition has been accused of being Sunni Islamists seeking to eliminate minority sects (e.g. Christians, Druze, Shia) while the regime has been accused of perpetuating sectarianism to present a false image of Assad as a pluralist (Blanford, 2011).

As these agendas grew over time, Syrian civilians suffered greatly. Campaigns cast by sectarianism motivated kidnappings, sexual violence, looting, and ethnic cleansing with several churches and mosques being attacked (Phillips, 2015). Slums started to arise in rural areas due to severe impoverishment from economic reforms favoring the Alawi elite and eventually, sectarian

patterns emerged across Syria with government forces securing major cities including Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo while rebel groups flocked to the northwest (Figure 1.1) (DeYoung and Sly, 2017).

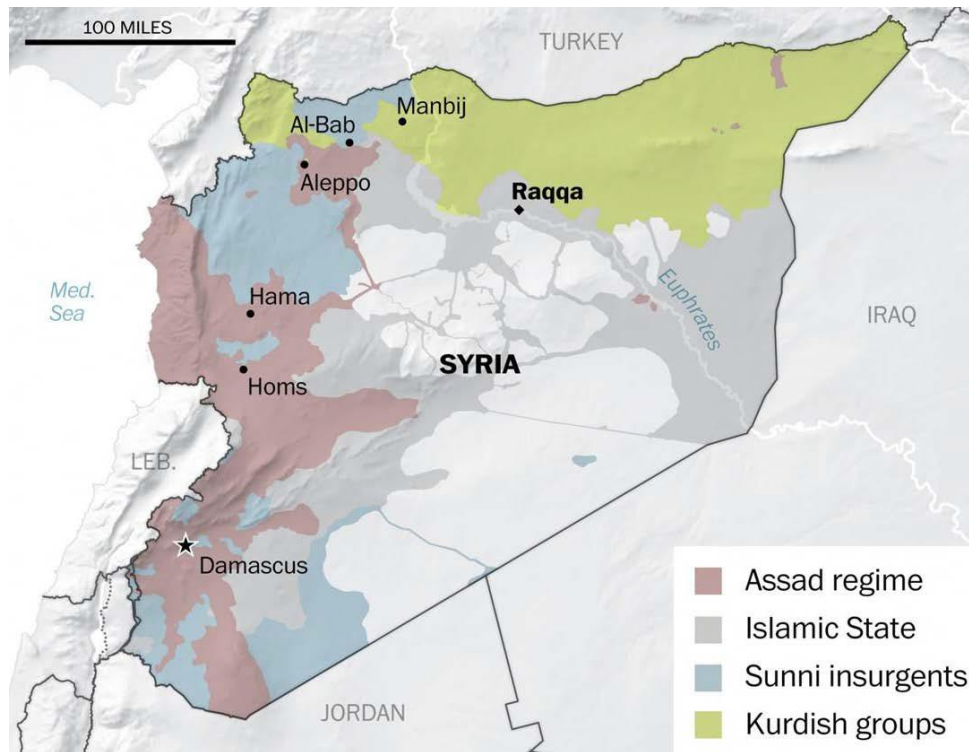


Figure 1.1 Syrian conflict and areas of control. *Source: The Washington Post*

Amidst the turmoil, roughly 470,000 Syrians have been killed (Human Rights Watch, 2017), 4.8 million fled to neighbouring countries, and 6.5 million were internally displaced in Syria (Rodgers et al., 2016).

The plight of the Syrian refugee crisis became a major issue in Canada during the federal election of 2015. If elected, the Liberal government under Justin Trudeau promised to welcome and resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees by early 2016 as part of their #WelcomeRefugees initiative. Following their victory, this goal was achieved and by August 2018, 58,600 Syrians were resettled (IRCC, 2018). Equal numbers of refugees arrived through the government-assisted and private sponsorship stream (27,100 and 26,600, respectively) while a smaller fraction (4,900)

arrived through the blended-visa referral stream. As well, nearly half of the resettled Syrians are women arriving with large families (upwards of 6 to 7 members) (IRCC, 2018), suggesting that seeking and securing gainful employment will be critical to their integration.

1.6 Summary and gaps

Employment integration is a common challenge faced by incoming refugees. Refugee women in particular are acutely impacted by labour market barriers and responsibilities in and outside the home leading to poor quality jobs. There are important limitations to our current understanding of employment integration, including a lack of studies that examine employment separately from other settlement needs or separately from other immigrant categories, and a lack of understanding about the contexts that shape refugee women's employment experiences. The existing Canadian literature primarily comprises of cross-sectional studies and census data. Therefore, there is a need for information-rich accounts through qualitative studies.

Currently, employment outcomes of refugees are homogenized with the experiences of other immigrant categories (Yssaad and Fields, 2018). As well, employment may be assessed alongside health (Maximova and Krahn, 2010), housing (Ryan and Woodhill, 2000), and overall settlement experience (Husni et al., 2002). Yet, the psychosocial profiles of refugees differ significantly from that of other immigrants, due largely from their forced departure, and employment is a key determinant of both economic and social integration in their new country (Segal and Mayadas, 2005). Even within the refugee category, different streams of refugees exist. It is likely that employment experiences differ among these streams although a distinction is rarely made in the literature.

In addition, with a few exceptions, much of the discussion around employment of refugee women has focused on select labour market barriers including language proficiency and credential recognition. Other conditions, such as the impact of settlement policy and

programming and gender roles are seldom explored especially from the perspective of women themselves.

The present study attempts to fill the gaps presented and provide a comprehensive picture of refugee women's employment experiences. A better understanding of the intersections of immigrant status, gender, and work would be valuable for directing future research and policy and practice to achieve positive and meaningful employment of incoming refugees to Canada.

1.7 Study aims & objectives

To address these gaps in the literature, this dissertation employed the following research objectives:

1. To explore the employment integration process as experienced by refugee women and key informants who can speak to refugee resettlement;
2. Identify challenges the women face in securing employment and how they navigate through them;
3. Explore the influence of settlement policy and programming in shaping the women's employment experience;
4. Explore and understand how changing gender roles interact with employment; and
5. Identify potential avenues and strategies to promote a safe and secure employment experience for refugees.

1.8 Dissertation organization

This dissertation is composed of six chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 describes the research design and methods employed in this study. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 consist of manuscripts submitted to, and published in peer-reviewed journals which collectively achieve the research objectives. Chapter 6 summarizes and compares key findings from the manuscripts, conceptualizes the findings toward an employment integration model, outlines research contributions, identifies implications for policy and practice, and provides a discussion on strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation and directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Methods

This chapter describes the theoretical and methodological frameworks applied to this research study. It begins with an overview of the study design and theoretical orientation that underpins the research. Next, a detailed discussion on the sample, recruitment, and data collection and analysis is provided before concluding with key ethical considerations. This chapter provides a full description of the methods used in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

2.1 Study Design and Theoretical Orientation

To achieve the aims and objectives of this thesis, a qualitative research design was employed. Qualitative research is an appropriate design when conducting research that is explorative and research that seeks to understand phenomena. Particularly, a qualitative design examines the way in which the world is understood or produced by people's lives, behaviour, and interactions (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It considers social context dynamics, individuals' perspectives in their own worlds, and appreciates those worlds through such perspectives (Creswell, 1998; Savage, 2000). In this respect, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Creswell and Poth, 2017) that "seeks to discover the new" (Flick, 1998) by "making sense of phenomena through meanings people bring to them" (Creswell and Poth, 2017). Thus, qualitative research arrives at findings from real-world settings that unfold naturally (Patton, 2001). Accordingly, this design was deemed suitable for the present study given that the overarching aim was to explore the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women from the women's perspective.

Feminist grounded theory guided this study. Feminist grounded theory combines feminist postmodern inquiry with grounded theory to address issues of power, authority, subjugation, and seeks social change and/or social transformation as it emerges through women's experiences

(Hesse-Biber, 2012). This theory postulates that women's experiences vary according to different characteristics (e.g. social position) and so there exists multiple truths that need to be explored (Allen and Baber, 1992). A feminist grounded theory thus allows us to explore different dimensions in one's life to raise questions about existing social structures (Wuest, 1995) leading to theory in terms of "pluralities and diversities rather than unities and universals" (Scott, 1990). The basic tenants of this theory suggest that: a) women are knowers and a legitimate source of knowledge, b) knowledge is not dichotomous but discovered in rich accounts, and c) the researcher is a social being who is involved in creating meaning (Wuest, 1995).

This theoretical orientation is important to the present study for a few reasons. First, the ways in which different structures (e.g. resettlement stream, settlement agencies) and contexts (e.g. gender), influenced employment integration were highlighted throughout this work while promoting diversity through inclusion of multiple standpoints. Particularly, in interviewing Syrian refugee women and key informants, the study offered two vantage points that inform emerging concepts, central to grounded theory and feminist research.

Second, social change, a critical premise of feminist grounded theory was addressed. As Acker et al. (1991) explain, "understanding the processes that result in inequalities is a necessary step toward changing women's position". Accordingly, rather than simply describing what is occurring, a feminist grounded approach provided a conceptual picture of the women's employment experience in Canada which can be used to inform future policy and programming.

Further, this approach allowed us to ask questions around subjugated knowledge. Particularly, an understanding of the intersections of immigrant status, gender, and work were unearthed, providing a different lens to analyze what we know (Wuest, 1995).

2.2 Sample

A purposive sampling approach is frequently used in qualitative research to identify information-rich cases that provide in-depth insight into the central issues of the research and questions under study (Patton, 1990). In this study, a purposive sampling approach was appropriate and was used to select Syrian refugee women who had experience with seeking out employment as newly arrived refugees as well as key informants who worked closely with refugee populations and can speak to the facilitators and barriers they may encounter as they integrate.

The study took place in Southern Ontario. This location was chosen given that nearly one third of Syrian refugees resettled in metropolitan areas within Ontario, providing access to a large sample. Refugee women were eligible to participate if they had been in Canada for at least one year and up to a maximum of six years and who were actively seeking or had sought employment. These cut-offs were chosen since one year is usually when guaranteed income supports by the government or private sponsors end, pushing refugees to seek employment and, it has been six years since the onset of the civil war making it is safe to assume that some Syrians may have sought asylum in Canada since the beginning of the war. Refugee women who had stopped searching for employment were included since this presented extra barriers these women encountered which may have discouraged their search, thus adding an extra layer to our understanding of their employment integration experience.

Some variation was achieved across the resettlement streams with 12 women arriving through the government-assisted refugee stream, 4 privately sponsored, and 2 through the blended-visa referral program. Two participants in the study arrived as refugee claimants and were included since they were not eligible for income supports and thus could offer a different perspective on employment integration.

The women were pre-screened by a screening questionnaire to ensure they were over the age of 18 and able to provide consent since the focus of the study was on adult women. No limitations were imposed on marital status, number of dependents, or language. That is, women who were single, married, widowed, or common-law, with or without dependents (children, parents, other family members), and who could speak either English or Arabic were included. Again, this allowed the inclusion of a diverse array of Syrian refugee women, with different responsibilities and language proficiency, ensuring a rich sample.

Key informants in this study were individuals who worked in settlement agencies in the community with knowledge around newcomer populations, mainly refugees. This included those individuals that worked directly with newcomers in a one-on-one or group capacity such as employment counselors and case workers or those individuals associated with the agency operation and administration such as program managers. Key informants were required to have been at their organization for at least one year, to ensure they had adequate information about their organization's activities and experience working with refugees. All of the settlement agencies were non-profit, however, there was some differentiation, with 3 key informants working at ethno-specific organizations, 2 working at an agency exclusive to newcomer women, and 2 working at agencies with a focus on employment.

A total of 20 Syrian refugee women and 9 key informants completed the study which is in line with suggestions by pioneer qualitative researchers (Creswell, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; Green and Thorogood, 2009). As well, with a sample of 29 participants, we found that themes were sufficiently developed and discernable relationships between categories were found.

2.3 Recruitment

Recruitment strategies differed for refugee women and key informants, each of which are described in detail below.

2.3.1 Syrian refugee women

The primary recruitment method used to recruit refugee women was the gatekeeper approach. Gatekeepers are individuals in the community that interact with refugees on a daily basis and often have formed trusting relationships (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). These relationships were leveraged to help explain the study to potential participants and ensure informed consent. Gatekeepers typically worked at settlement agencies in the Kitchener-Waterloo or Toronto region and had previously shown interest in the study and agreed to help in any way they could. Thus, information and consent forms (Appendix A) were sent to gatekeepers directly which described the study objectives, how to participate, and contact details should the women wish to contact me directly. Alternatively, if the women allowed, gatekeepers provided me with the women's contact details, providing me with the opportunity to call or email them directly. Gatekeeper recruitment through settlement agencies was effective and resulted in access to 14 eligible Syrian refugee women.

Other recruitment efforts included community fliers, emailing listservs, and social media outreach. Fliers in English and translated to Arabic were posted at locations frequently by newcomers including settlement agencies, community centers, cafes, and culture-based centers. An initial standard email was also sent to a list of employment agencies in the Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto area. This email asked whether these agencies were able to post a small blurb about the study on the careers section of their website, with my contact information available for participants to use at their discretion. Finally, a last strategy to recruit Syrian

women was social media. This involved placing an ad on Bunz as well as messaging potential Syrian women we found through newcomer pages on Facebook with open member lists to gauge their interest in participating. This latter approach was the second most effective, with 5 women recruited and agreeing to participate in the study. All recruitment correspondence further highlighted that the women would receive a \$25 honorarium for their participation and in appreciation of their time and commitment to the study.

2.3.2 Key informants

Recruitment of key informants occurred simultaneously with the recruitment of Syrian refugee women in this study. Specifically, while we gained the support of individuals in the settlement sector as gatekeepers to recruit women, information and consent forms that included details on their own participation was also provided (Appendix B). A snowball approach was then employed with these individuals providing the names and contact details of potential key informants to seek out.

Direct calling and emailing was a second recruitment strategy used to recruit key informants. To do this, we first identified settlement agencies in Southern Ontario that catered to refugee needs and provided employment-related assistance through either a google search or prior researcher knowledge. Staff with direct contact information available on the site's directory page and whose role was relevant to the study (e.g. employment counselor) were contacted via email to participate. A follow-up email was sent two weeks later to remind potential participants of the study and their involvement. Key informants from 7 different settlement agencies agreed to participate each of whom had varying roles in their respective organizations. The majority were Program Managers (4), followed by 3 Employment Counselors, an Executive Director and a Founder/CEO.

2.4 Data collection

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Syrian refugee women and key informants between March and September 2018. The interviews were conducted one-time, at a time and location convenient to the participants and typically lasted anywhere between 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. The women preferred to meet in public spaces such as cafes while key informants preferred to meet at their place of employment or have interviews conducted over the phone. Only one interview was conducted over the phone with a refugee woman who had recently moved and could not meet in person.

Prior to each interview, critical issues presented in the information and consent forms were discussed again including study objectives, confidentiality, and recording and storing of interview data. In the case of Arabic-speaking participants, all information and interviews occurred alongside an informal interpreter who worked in the settlement sector and offered to help with the study. Participants were informed when the recording started and again when it was turned off at the end of the interview. Finally, once completed, I thanked the participant for their participation and provided the honorarium in the case of refugee women. In the following one to two weeks of the interviews, I sent participants a feedback letter (Appendix C) which included a statement of appreciation, reinstated confidentiality, and an indication of when the study results would be available and how to obtain a copy.

2.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection in this study. This data gathering tool is best described as a form of conversation that combines structure with flexibility (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Green and Thorogood, 2018). Structure comes from the key topics or themes that a researcher wants to cover during the interview while flexibility is inherent

to the structure, allowing the researcher to probe and explore responses or other issues raised outside of the topic guide (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

The interview guides for Syrian refugee women (Appendix D) and key informants (Appendix E) used a combination of content mapping and content mining questions. Content mapping questions broadly looked at key themes central to employment integration in Canada while content mining questions explored these themes in detail to understand the participant's perspective (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). For instance, in the Syrian refugee interview guide, a content mapping question broadly asked "Tell me about your experience of finding employment since settling" while a content mining question probed from the response to elicit more detail such as "Is there anyone helping you?".

Finally, in the Arabic interviews, the interpreter translated the conversation from English to Arabic and vice versa to allow a free flow of information between myself and these women. I allotted a bit more time for Arabic speaking women to reply or ask for clarification given the language barrier when compared to English interviews. Lastly, nearing the end of the interview, I asked participants to comment on any final thoughts they forgot to mention, before thanking them for their participation and ending the interview.

After each interview, field notes were written to capture initial impressions, comment on possible themes for analysis, and new questions or findings that may inform future interviews.

2.4.2 Feminist reflexive interviewing

In line with feminist qualitative research, this study employed feminist reflexive interviewing throughout the in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This form of interviewing emphasizes reciprocity to reduce hierarchy between the researcher and participant (Oakley, 1993; Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2007). Specifically, the researcher and participant are interactively linked in

the co-construction of meaning throughout the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2006). The researcher further acknowledges his or her realities or lived experiences but does not allow them to interfere with participant accounts and meanings (Ponterotto, 2005). This is done through “bracketing” where a researcher moves to suspend everyday assumptions in order to explore how these very social structures and processes are created (Schutz, 1970; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). Two key factors were considered while employing feminist reflexive interviewing in this study.

First, a researcher needs to understand his or her own values, attitudes, and experiences and how this may shape or intervene in the research (Hesse-Biber, 2006). This reflexivity will help identify any preconceptions brought forth which can affect the creation of knowledge. Thus, it was necessary to consider my own social and personal characteristics with respect to this topic. Before commencing an interview, then, questions I considered included: How do I view refugee women and their employability in Canada? How does my perspective shape my research agenda? According to Harding (1993), reflecting on my social positioning has the ability to maximize objectivity and ensures that the “participant’s voice is represented, listened to, and understood throughout the research process”.

Second, feminist interviewing requires carefully listening to participants in the interview process. Aside from the predefined interview guide, researchers need to be prepared to follow the pace of the interview and address questions as they emerge. This means researchers need to remain attentive and pick up on markers. Picking up on participant markers or cues show participants that you are interested and value what their saying. Markers can include changes in participant’s tone, body language, or comments made in passing, which, again, can prompt questions outside of the interview schedule (Hesse-Biber, 2006). For example, in the cases of a

few women, questions around their mental health and well-being produced moments of fidgeting or looking down. I realized this was a sensitive topic and proceeded to ask if they were comfortable sharing details or if they needed some time. The women began to speak about their experiences of separation from family and friends which, in some shape or another, affected their job searches and presented a new area to explore.

2.4.3 Demographic survey

A demographic survey was administered to each participant prior to the interviews. The survey consisted of a series of items to provide background information. This included information on age, level of education, marital status, annual income, number of dependents, length of time in Canada, pre-migration employment, and current employment status.

2.5 Data management and analysis

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim onto separate Word documents and stored on a secure, password-protected, University of Waterloo server. For Arabic interviews, only portions of the interviews that were translated to English were transcribed.

To begin, transcripts were reviewed while listening to audio recordings to ensure accuracy of data and add on non-verbal interview data (e.g. pauses, laughing). Then, the data underwent a constructivist grounded theory analysis to distill data into categories and subsequently link and compare categories within and across data to develop key themes.

All data were analyzed using NVivo qualitative statistical software (QSR International, 2014).

2.5.1 Data analysis

A constructivist grounded theory method (CGTM) was used to analyze study data. CGTM draws on traditional grounded theory approach to include the social context from which data emerges

and is a commonly used method of analysis that allows for an “inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive” exploration of data (Charmaz, 2006). This approach works well with in-depth, semi-structured interviews since both are emergent methods (Charmaz, 2008) that function to generate theory from the shared experiences of the researcher and participant rather than discovered in the traditional grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).

Following transcription, a handful of interview data were selected and used to develop an initial coding scheme. Coding describes the process where data are broken down into discrete parts that capture actions, strategies, meanings (Lawrence and Tar, 2013; Green and Thorogood, 2018), and then put back together when specific features are identified to form relationships or connections (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Codes included deductive, pre-determined codes from previous literature and reflected issues within the immediate domain of the interview questions and inductive, codes that emerged from the data and were not initially framed by the interview questions. For each code, a brief description was created and these codes and descriptions were continuously reviewed and refined with the study supervisor until a consensus was reached on a coding framework (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Coding Framework

CODE	DESCRIPTION
1. BARRIERS	Challenges or barriers to securing a job e.g. mention of transportation, child care, language. Can be participant or analyst assessment.
2. BORDERING CO	Life in bordering countries including for instance Jordon, Lebanon, or Turkey. Can include mention of money, work, education, etc.
3. BREADWINNER	Mention of who primarily supported the family financially.
4. CHANGE	Recommendations for changes to the system.
5. CONTACTS	When the participant mentions contacts or referrals to contacts that may facilitate the job search (can also be referral to volunteer positions).
6. CULTURE	How cultural norms and traditions played a role in the women’s expectation in and outside of the home.

	Can be participant or analyst assessment.
7. DIDN'T KNOW	Participant reflection on their and other gaps in knowledge relating to employment, resources available in community, programs. Can include analyst assessment that participant is unaware.
8. DISCRIM	Experiences of discrimination since arriving e.g. by employers, healthcare professionals
9. DOUBLE DAY	When the participant talks about juggling their responsibilities both in and outside of the home. Can be participant or analyst assessment.
10. DREAM	When the participant talks about what their dream job is.
11. ENTREPRENEUR	Mention of starting their own business and what that would entail. May overlap with DREAM or FEMINIZED INDUST.
12. FAMILY ROLE	Any mention of their role in the family or household. Can include participant reflection on how their role has changed.
13. FEAR	Participants reflects or describes any past or current fears they may hold (e.g. safety of children, war, about their future, etc.).
14. FEMINIZED INDUST	Any mention of searching for, being referred to, or finding a job in sectors that are primarily female oriented e.g. tailoring, cooking
15. HEALTH	Mention of health status and whether that has changed and/or related to their job search. Can be participant or analyst assessment.
16. JOB	Current job/work as well as previous employment prior to coming to Canada. Can include mention of spouse job. May overlap with BREADWINNER.
17. MENTAL HEALTH	Participant reflection on their mental health and well-being and whether that affects their ability to work. May overlap with HEALTH.
18. MISREP	Any mention of information relayed between parties that misrepresents the situation.
19. MONEY	Any financial impact or insecurities since arriving in Canada. Also mention of salary or other payments.
20. OPPORTUNITY	Participation reflection or frustration of not being able to prove themselves with employers. May overlap with CHANGE.
21. OTHER INS	Refers to reliance on other income supports e.g. EI, Ontario Works
22. PROGRAM	Any mention of participation in programs or resources in the community, work or non-work related e.g. employment center, language classes.
23. PRE-EXIST TIES	When participants mention ties to employers in the community to help secure employment as well as quality of relationship with these employers
24. REFUGEE GRP	Any mention of differences in employment integration based on refugee category (e.g. GAR, PSR, BVOR, Refugee claimant)
25. SEPARATION	When the participant talks about being separated from family members e.g. children, spouse

26. SET COUNS	Quality of relationship with settlement counsellors. Can also include participant reflection or frustration with settlement counselors relating to employment.
27. SPONSORS	Quality of relationship with sponsors; can include mention of financial or emotional support. This will likely only be relevant to privately-sponsored refugees.
28. VOLUNTEER	Engaging in volunteer positions as a means to promote their business, gain Canadian experience, practice English, network, etc.
29. CONTACTS	When the participant mentions contacts or referrals that helped or can help in securing a job (can include volunteer position)
30. FEAR	When the participant reflects on any past or current fears about safety of children, war, future, etc.
31. SPONSORS	Quality of relationship with sponsors (can include mention of financial or emotional support)

The coding framework was applied as data collection and analysis progressed. This iterative interplay between data collection and analysis allowed for constant comparison and deviant case analysis to ensure validation. The constant comparative method suggests that every part of data, i.e. emerging codes, categories, properties, and dimensions, are constantly compared both within and across interview data to explore variations, similarities, and differences (Hallberg, 2006). Deviant case analysis, on the other hand, involves searching for and including those cases that do not support emerging patterns. These cases can add credibility to analysis if theory predicts why they are an exception but also can help revise, broaden, or adjust emerging theory (Green and Thorogood, 2018). Constant comparison and deviant case analysis are both tools used in grounded theory analysis to provide a thorough account of the data (Green and Thorogood, 2018). Memo writing was also used throughout the data collection and analysis process to reflect on data, relationships, and emergent findings.

Once all interviews were coded, code summaries (a summary of each code within an interview and across interviews) were created to distill findings and facilitate in-depth analysis of key themes within and across the data. These themes, informed by field notes and memos, were

decided on by the lead researcher in consultation with the study supervisor and committee members to explore in the manuscripts and throughout this dissertation.

2.6 Ethical considerations

This study received ethics approval from the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board (ORE #22866) on February 28, 2018. A number of factors were required to successfully implement this research including informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and safeguards to potential risks from participating.

Information and consent forms were provided to participants in advance of the interviews and detailed the goals and purpose of the study, how the data will be used, what is required from participants, as well as issues surrounding participant rights. Particularly, informed consent implies that participation is voluntary so, participants were reassured that they may choose to leave the study at any stage without facing repercussion.

Second, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through a variety of means. Refugee women and key informants were stripped of any identifying information on all data and reports that came out of the study. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, with a separate excel sheet linking participant to pseudonym stored on a secure, password protected server at the University of Waterloo.

Lastly, given the sensitive nature of this research study and personal experiences in a war-torn country and post-migration, special consideration and safeguards were in place to protect the women against risk. A list of resources was made available to the women in cases where difficult topics arose during our conversation. As well, the presence of the interpreter, who is also a settlement worker, seemed to ease some of the women's concerns since they had a direct line to support through the interpreter. Finally, in instances where distressing topics came up,

such as their quality of life in neighbouring countries, for example, I assured them we could stop the recording if they needed a break or move on to a different topic if it was too much to talk about. In most cases, however, the women wanted to share their stories and we continued with the interviews.

Chapter 3

“Can someone help me?” Refugee women’s experiences of using settlement agencies to find work in Canada

Status: Under Review in Journal of International Migration and Integration

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Philip Bigelow, PhD

Abstract

This article examines refugee women's experience with settlement agencies and their employment outcomes in Canada. Based on qualitative data, we found that employment was not a priority to settlement agencies with many counselors referring the women to low-skilled, low-waged positions with companies with whom they had pre-existing ties. Meanwhile, counselors found themselves burdened with large workloads and felt inadequately equipped to serve the needs of refugees. Through this study, we propose policy recommendations that address women's disproportional barriers that can be integrated within programs and services offered by settlement agencies to improve employment integration.

Keywords: refugees; employment; settlement agency; gender; Canada

3.1 Introduction

In Canada, settlement agencies and similar institutions are central hubs for newly arrived immigrants to seek help with entering the labour market. While these agencies are designed to assist immigrants as an overarching group, refugees are often not differentiated. Particularly, little is known about the effectiveness of these agencies in securing employment for refugees, the opportunities they have, and refugee satisfaction with the services rendered. In this paper, we explore a knowledge gap in labour market performance of refugees, specifically refugee women, seeking help from settlement agencies. This exploration provides a deeper understanding of not only the multiple and competing circumstances of refugee employment integration but also how settlement agencies can, in some ways, facilitate or hinder employment.

The paper is organized as follows: we begin with the context of refugee labour market integration by reviewing research grounded in Canada and elsewhere followed by settlement

agencies as intermediaries to employment. This context will lend to the research objectives and methodology used to ascertain the objectives. Then, we tease out the specificities of refugees accessing settlement agencies in terms of the quality of employment-related services, skill assessment to prepare for employment, and employment opportunities presented. We conclude with a discussion that situates the findings in the broader construction of settlement agencies and offer recommendations for improvement.

Refugees and Employment

Refugees have a difficult time entering the labour market. Their unemployment rate remains high in Canada (nearly double) when compared to other immigrant groups and, when they do secure employment, may take several years to converge (in terms of income) with Canadian workers (Wilkinson and Garcea, 2017). Across the EU, refugees fair slightly better, with unemployment rates below 20% but still double that of native-born (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018).

Commonly cited barriers to Canadian labour market integration include non-recognition of foreign credentials (Creese and Wiebe, 2012; Este and Tachble, 2009; Guo, 2009; Lacroix, Baffoe, & Liguori, 2015; P.S. Li & Li, 2013; Raza, Beaujot, & Woldemicael, 2013), lack of language proficiency (Chaze and George, 2013; Fuller and Martin, 2012; Frank, 2013; Grenier and Xue, 2010; Stewart et al., 2008), and Canadian work experience (Baffoe, 2010; Jackson and Bauder, 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2016). Comparable jurisdictions in the EU (Ghorashi and Tillburg, 2006; Tomlinson, 2010; Frykman, 2012; Cheung and Phillimore, 2014; Liebig and Tronstad, 2018) and Australia (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006; Kosny, Santos, & Reid, 2017) have reported similar refugee employment experiences as those found in Canada. In their study of refugees in the Netherlands (arriving from Iran and Afghanistan), for instance, Ghorashi and

Tillburg (2006) found language was the frequent cause of exclusion from employment. However, the authors linked exclusion within the broader context of cultural difference and ‘image of migrants’ as dissimilar to Dutch persons, making it harder to secure a job. Similarly, refugees arriving in the UK described being treated as a stranger when experience and qualifications were not recognized (Tomlinson, 2010). In Australia, newcomers used strategies to minimize their culture, such as remove non-Australian work experience, as a way to gain access to the labour market (Kosny, Santos, & Reid, 2017). Yet, many workers still found themselves in poor quality jobs characterized by racialized discrimination and harassment.

While many of the employment-related obstacles that refugees face are shared with other immigrants, refugees tend to face these barriers more acutely. Particularly, the migratory process which can include time in refugee camps, in transit between neighbouring countries, and prolonged asylum claims can interrupt education, careers, and career building, resulting in substantial periods of unemployment (de Jong, 2018) as well as atrophy of their skills (Hooper, Desiderio, and Salant, 2017).

Refugees, Employment, and Settlement Agencies

In Canada, settlement agencies provide programs and supports directly by governments or through public institutions and nonprofit providers, often in partnership with governments, to assist newcomer populations establish themselves. Terminology used outside Canada, yet withstanding the same basic tenets, include integration services, immigrant service sector, as well as migrant support service sector (Bauder and Jayaraman, 2014; de Jong, 2018). These agencies are often considered the intermediary between a newcomer and their new community (Awuah-Mensah, 2016), targeting both immediate and long-term needs. Immediate needs can

include help with housing, healthcare or day-to-day necessities (e.g. transportation, banking, etc.) while long-term needs address social and economic integration, including employment.

Although they are a highly trusted and sought-after resource, the use of settlement agencies has been found to be somewhat of a ‘double edged sword’ (Kosny, Yanar, Begum, Premji, & Al-Khooly, 2017). Particularly, the multi-sectoral nature of settlement agencies compounded with high client workloads and limited funding structures often means that newcomers are placed in poor quality jobs not aligned with their previous skills and education, with little to no follow-up on their employment outcome or experience (Kosny et al., 2017). The disadvantaged position of refugees, as described previously, extends onto settlement agencies to provide employment assistance contingent on their needs and experiences, even though that is not always the case.

Specifically, refugees accessing these services may be more inclined to take on any position offered out of pressure to support family members when income supports cease (Kosny, Lifshen, MacEachen, Smith, & Jafri, 2011). A recent study on newcomers, of which a third were refugees, found that newcomers were hesitant to speak up about their health and safety concerns at the workplace since the jobs were leveraged through connections between settlement agencies and employers, and workers felt they needed to be grateful (Yanar, Kosny, & Smith, 2018). In a similar study, a comparison between newcomers recruited from settlement agencies and Canadian-born workers found that newcomers were more likely to be placed in temporary jobs and experienced significantly higher levels of empowerment vulnerability than their Canadian counterparts (Lay, Kosny, Aery, Flecker, & Smith, 2018). Here, empowerment vulnerability is issues with reporting hazards in the workplace out of fear of jeopardizing employment. Settlement agencies are also known to employ a one-size-fits-all delivery model that does not

account for the differential needs of refugees (Evans and Shields, 2014). Particularly, while other immigrants may *chose* to leave their country for positive reasons and usually are able to plan their entry into the host country, refugees are *pushed* out in a rushed nature due to war-conflicts and fear of persecution (Segal and Mayadas, 2005). In homogenizing the experience of refugees and immigrants, settlement agencies may offer programs and supports that do not match refugee background, skills, and experience, thus affecting their employment outcomes.

Further, refugees accessing these services not only report finding low waged, low-skilled positions (Lauer, Wilkinson, Rick, & Ka, 2012) but also issues inherent to access and outreach. In an evaluation of the recent Syrian cohort that arrived in late 2016, for instance, nearly three-quarters of government-sponsored refugees reported minimal knowledge around employment agencies and so, did not use them (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2016). This is echoed by interviews with service providers who believe that promotion of services is lacking among newcomers leading to low uptake (IRCC, 2018). As a result, refugees may lack a basic understanding of the job application process in Canada (Stewart et al., 2008) including how to communicate effectively with employers (Thomas, 2015) and steps required to upgrade credentials for an employment position if need be (Zuberi & Ptashnick, 2012).

In Canada, there are over 1200 settlement agencies available of which roughly 380 focus directly on employment-related services. Here, newcomers can get help on resume writing, job searches, mock interviews, referrals to employers, as well as access to volunteer or intern placements, to name a few. Despite their large presence, the role of settlement agencies in influencing employment outcomes of refugees in particular is less established in the literature. This is concerning given the height of the current refugee crisis and Canada's promise to resettle

more refugees in the coming years, many of whom will access settlement agencies for employment.

As part of a broader program of research examining the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugee women and key informants to examine challenges to seeking and securing employment. Refugee women were chosen as the population of interest since they are usually inexperienced in the workforce either by choice or due to cultural norms (Franz, 2003) and typically take on low-waged, low-skilled positions out of financial necessity (Young and Chan, 2015). Women also encounter double (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2005; Dyck, 2006; Reid and LeDrew, 2013) and triple day (Premji and Shakya, 2017; Liebig and Tronstad, 2018) when unskilled paid employment, domestic responsibilities and volunteer roles intersect forcing the women to juggle multiple competing demands. Consequently, women may experience challenges disproportionately and provide a unique opportunity for research in the post-migration context.

A recurring topic of this research was the role of settlement agencies to employment integration. Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore refugee women's experience with settlement agencies and how this shapes their employment experience.

3.2 Methods

This study was guided by a feminist grounded theory approach (Wuest, 1995). Feminist grounded theory is a research method that allows a researcher to explore micro- and macro-level influences about existing social structures in women's lives (Wuest, 1995). Here, women are the knowledge knowers and any generated hypotheses emerge from, and is tied to the data, rather than preconceived notions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Wuest, 1995).

Feminist grounded theory is concerned with social change and/or social transformation. Rather than simply describing what is occurring, a conceptual picture of why and how something is the way it is becomes apparent. In this study, through interviews with refugee women and key informants, we wanted to know the women's experience of finding work. Participants discussed challenges and barriers to employment, competing demands in and outside the home, and the role of settlement agencies in these experiences.

Recruitment

A purposive sampling approach (Patton, 1990) was used to recruit refugee women and key informants through a wide array of outlets. Briefly, an email outlining the study was sent to resettlement and employment agencies in the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo region, with whom we have pre-existing ties. We also recruited through social media (Facebook), posted fliers at venues frequented by newcomers (language classes, family centers, community centers, etc.), and lastly, we employed cold calling and emailing to non-profit and ethno-cultural organizations that cater to newcomer needs.

We recruited 20 refugee women and 9 key informants. At the time of interviews, the women were either actively seeking work, occasionally looking for work, currently working (albeit in precarious positions), or had given up searching for work all together. Since we were interested in Syrian refugee women, we sought participants arriving on an ongoing basis since the onset of the civil war in 2011. We found that women typically arrived within the past 2.5 years which coincides with the large influx of Syrian refugees accepted in Canada at the end of 2016. Given that income supports typically end one-year post-arrival, we recruited participants who had been in the country for a minimum of 1 year. We initially targeted women, 18 years or older, who either spoke English or Arabic and came through any of the resettlement streams

(government, private, or blended-visa referral³) but then went on to include refugee claimants.

Claimants were asylum-seeking individuals that came to Canada on their own and whose refugee claim was submitted and pending approval by the Immigration Review Board. Refugee claimants came with different sociodemographic backgrounds (e.g. language proficiency, higher educational attainment) and thus added a new layer of complexity to employment integration.

Key informants included those individuals who work closely with newcomers to help with settlement-related issues at settlement organizations and private sponsorship groups. These positions can include employment counselors, case workers/managers, life skill coaches, program developers and administrators, and the like.

Among the women, roughly one-half had been in Canada for 1-2 years, arriving mostly through the government-assisted refugee stream. The women had a range of educational backgrounds with most having elementary ($n = 4$) or high school ($n = 9$) and some having either attended university/college ($n = 4$) or obtaining a university/college degree ($n = 3$). Prior to arriving, three-quarters of the women held jobs whether in Syria or neighbouring countries such as Lebanon or Turkey. These positions varied, from chefs and artisanal crafters to teachers and travel consultants. Table 3.1 and 3.2 provides more information on the Syrian women and key informants, respectively.

³ Government-assisted, privately sponsored, and blended visa office-referred refugees differ in terms of sponsorship agent and services and supports rendered. GARs are supported completely by the federal government and are entitled to receive income supports, up to one year of arrival, to cover start-up and ongoing costs. PSRs on the other hand are funded through private sponsor groups (incorporated organizations, a group of five Canadian citizens or permanent residents, community sponsors) who assume all financial responsibility for the refugee(s) and assist in integrating refugees into society for a period up to 12 months, similar to GARs. Lastly, BVOR is a joint venture between the government and private sponsorship groups, which seeks to cost-share by equally incurring financial responsibility.

Interviews

One-time, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants between March and September 2018. The interviews took place at a time and location convenient to the refugee women and key informants, such as by phone, place of employment, or in a café, and lasted between 30 minutes to 2 hours. Most interviews with the women (12) were conducted in Arabic and required the presence of an informal interpreter during the interview. The interpreter was a Syrian volunteer who arrived in Canada before the war. A small stipend was provided for her time and dedication to the study. Refugee women were given an honorarium of \$25 in appreciation of their time as well as feedback letters with our contact details should they wish to reach out with further questions, concerns, or to obtain study results.

Participants were asked about their experience of looking for work since arriving and key informants were asked to describe their experience of helping newcomers economically integrate. Participants were also asked about the policy, programming, services and supports currently available and how those affect employment prospects.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. An iterative process between data collection and data analysis was employed for refinement of analytic focus over time. This back-and-forth process allowed for issues arising in one interview to be integrated in future interviews and helped inform recruitment of subsequent participants. Detailed field notes were also written after each interview to describe the encounter, note observations of meeting context (interaction and behaviour), and record analytic insights.

Analysis

Data analysis followed a modified, grounded theory approach (Charmez, 2006) and analytic themes were developed inductively, based on the review of interview data. A master coding framework was developed using a representative number of transcripts. It was discussed and refined as the study progressed and applied to interview data using NVivo qualitative software (QSR International, 2014). Then, code summaries were created to distill findings and were constantly compared across and within data to systematically link and develop key themes. For the purpose of this manuscript, the first author subsequently reread all of the transcripts. She analyzed codes focusing specifically on service, supports, and programming available to refugee women and key emerging themes from these interviews.

This study received ethical approval from the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personal identifiers were used in this study and each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

3.3 Findings

Quality of services provided

Settlement agencies are typically the first stop for refugees to get information on many immediate necessities such as housing and leads to support for other services including employment-related advice. In our sample, nearly all of the women (19 of the 20) sought out these services yet many described how it was not what they expected. Particularly, they found themselves going through a pre-determined script or checklist with settlement workers, where employment was missed all together. The checklists were paper-based and/or electronic forms

settlement workers used to ensure they talked about priority issues they felt they needed to cover during a meeting.

...they [settlement agency] just focused on like, finish all your things that you need, you know, like the ones the government need from you, all the about the health care and stuff like that. Yeah, they would take us to our appointments, the dentist, and they finish all of these. It's a long process, like three, four months to finish it. It's a lot like we would go to the dentist like every single day for like a month. They told us a lot about this kind of stuff...[like] how to rent a house. But about job, you know, no. They didn't talk about [employment]... (Bella, working part-time in food services).

In Ontario, settlement workers typically do not need to undergo any sort of formal training to assist newcomers. Rather, settlement agencies themselves may decide to provide basic in-house training which would give rise to the checklists many of the women described.

If the women tried to sway from the script, which described basic needs, they were met with resistance.

So the government give them like a list to do. [But] our needs is not just like house or furniture. We have like beyond this. I made a request [with] the caseworker – can you help me with this [finding a job]? She would say this is not part of my job description. I cannot do it. So I ask her would they make a referral [to someone who can help]. She said, it's not my job description (Alia, unemployed; interpreter translated).

Given that the guaranteed 12 months of income supports were ending, many of the women were eager to start thinking about employment opportunities, and were most often referred to partner organizations or agencies in the community by settlement workers. This was challenging for the women, many of whom did not have access to transportation, making the travel between organizations long and difficult.

Okay so beside the financial support, we had a caseworker to give us information about transportation, how to use the grocery stores, and how to use to your VISA and bank card. They gave other resources if we are in the situation we need support with foodbank. Also they took us to the [employment agency], a resource for us... [But] transportation is very expensive. [I ask her how do you come to the employment center to get help]. [She said] I walk. From my school to the center is a 3 kilometer walk. I walked all the way from far... (Amine, unemployed; interpreter translated).

When the women eventually found their way to employment agencies, they were ultimately disappointed with the help they received. A small number of refugee women in our study did not hold paid employment positions in their home country. Rather, they had stayed at home to care for their large families (on average the women had 5 to 6 children). A lack of formal work experience coupled with lack of familiarity in the host country is greater in these women yet, employment counselors routinely used the same checklists with all their clients. For instance, these women described how they went through the process of making a resume and discussing jobs they might be interested in with employment counselors however, when it came time to apply to jobs they were referred to, counselors assumed the women would know how. The one-on-one support the women were looking for was ultimately missed.

Okay I come to the [employment agency] twice a month. I have appointment, then we sit down with the counselor for one hour sometimes two hours, using the computer, looking for a job and [after applying] no answer... They turn the computer off and I go home and nothing happen. And this is what happen every appointment. I want to find a job to be able to cover the expenses and the needs... There is no organization taking care of our specific situation. They have to sit down with us and look at our skills. What's our career [goal], our skills, and how to overcome the barriers (Alia, unemployed; interpreter translated).

The lack in follow-up and routine structure of helping with job searches can partly be attributed to large workloads of settlement workers. Key informants in our study study, mostly those in employment counselor positions, were often burdened with large influxes of newcomers in their waiting rooms, some with appointments but most coming as walk-ins. As some of the women described, the concept of scheduling a time to meet with someone was foreign to them since, in Syria, you can simply show up at a place of business or even a neighbour's house unannounced. Consequently, employment counselors found themselves having to 'process' a large number of clients in a short timeframe, as Jackie, an employment counselor, describes:

...my work load is 40 clients a month, and I kind of make notes to myself, and sometimes it's pressing things that I need to follow up on and sometimes it's not...It's hard because I wish I had a smaller work load...I was just having this conversation with a client because he was really frustrated. He has so many different people that he's working with, and he's like there's no one person dedicated to helping me from A to Z, it's very fragmented. He has a housing worker with [housing organization], he has me an employment counselor, working with three different people, the English teachers. So he was frustrated that his housing worker wasn't doing certain things for him. I was explaining to him that's not within the scope of her work. She probably has a large work load, and I was trying to explain to him it's the same thing with me.

To alleviate workloads, key informants described some of the changes they would like to see in the system to better assist newcomers. Marie, for instance, an employment counselor at an employment agency, recalled the days when she had help from 'transition assistants' that provided newcomers with the in-depth assistance they demanded while removing barriers relating to training, language, and culture at the same time.

Well, I think one of the things is that we had funding very soon after that huge influx [of Syrians] came for what we called, "transition assistants"...So those transition assistants were, not only in language, but they also interpreted culture. They were available to go out and do job coaching or give explanations of job shadowing, and that was really good... But in a way it was too soon because, you know, it was like that's when the influx came.

Here, transition assistants can be thought of as cultural mediators – individuals that shared a common background to the women and so were able to help them navigate the integration process.

Skills assessment geared toward low-skilled, low-waged positions

The women's initial encounter with settlement and employment agencies often highlighted their thin work history and, at times, educational background (more than half had high school or less education) that can be applied in the workforce. This sometimes meant gearing the women to take on any position, even volunteer roles, under the premise of 'gaining Canadian experience'.

This was the case for Bahar, a woman who had experience in the food sector in Syria but now was positioned in a precarious volunteer role:

So, I work in a clothing store. I organize shelves, I run some clothing, hang. Sometimes I go the storage downstairs, but it is only two hours every Thursday in the morning... Two hours for me is not good enough. So I asked if someone can help me also at the [employment center] to find a volunteer opportunity. [They] told me we cannot...(interpreter translated).

For Fatima, a once thriving hair salon owner in Syria, lack of language proficiency, non-recognition of her degree, and family demands, also placed her in a volunteer position doing menial work. She described the challenges she faced with balancing competing demands of having to take care of her elderly, ill mother and how the guidance she received essentially discouraged her from taking up hair styling at the time.

Whenever I express my intention to find a job, everybody tell me language [is an issue]... [Now I volunteer] but they never let me do everything for a customer. For example, I can support the hair stylist for part of highlight. I'm the assistant, not the main person who is doing everything (interpreter translated).

Privately sponsored refugees, whose primary source of supports and resources are the sponsors themselves, saw similar situations to the government-assisted refugee women. In particular, the privately sponsored refugee women in our study reflected on how, in an attempt to get to know the women better, their sponsors would inquire into their background, hobbies, and activities. While the women were very grateful for the interest the sponsors took in their well-being, the sponsors tended to gear the women into entrepreneurial, low-waged roles.

...my sponsor asked me some question, to find out what's my skills, what do I like to do and if I like to start work or not. Then they decide to buy me a sewing machine and they share with their friends and network about my skills. And they encourage people to come to me to fix a dress, pants. So they come for small thing, and then they [sponsors] find I'm very skilled. They bought me fabrics so now I [can] start from scratch... cutting and sewing... (Febe, unemployed; interpreter translated).

These positions are unrealistic in the sense that they are burdened with barriers relating to financial support (e.g. bank loans) as well as lack of access to resources that included business licenses, facilities to hold their businesses, personnel to help with marketing, and the like. In fact, nearly one-half of the women reported barriers to starting their own business, with financial support hindering all their prospects. Additionally, the women were largely unaware of how to promote their business, whether it be selling Syrian delicacies or providing tailoring services, and instead relied on their sponsor networks for quick sales and profits. This approach was limited in that it was supported through the goodwill of sponsors and their connections rather than a solid business plan. Similar to booking an appointment to meet with a counselor, the concept of licensing to operate a business was also foreign to most women. Many arrived with the preconceived notion that businesses can operate the same way they did in Syria. For example, Febe contrasts the situation in Syria and Canada when she tried to open a tailoring business:

... In Syria, we had an apartment in the fourth level so, on the main floor we opened our business. We did the same in Turkey. We rent apartment and we open our business...[But here] too many regulations (interpreter translated).

Our key informants saw the viability of these roles in the Canadian labour market as positive and actually promoted them through the programs offered at their organizations. These programs were largely gendered and functioned on the principle of creating a ‘social enterprise’ for the women where, they could practice English, network with other newcomers, and build their resume. For example, Sada, an Executive Director for a non-profit settlement agency, spoke about the benefits of a catering group her organization started for newcomer women:

...there is a need for that [Syrian cuisine] in terms of employment to encourage the Syrian women to get their opportunity... we have this program, we call it a [name of program], and we run it at the church where we invited the congregation of general public to attend cooking classes and it was the Syrian refugee lady who was teaching them how

to cook different meals. It was very successful, and after that they started contacting her, asking her for cooking something, or catering an event or something like that. But for them [Syrian women] there is a good need and a good opportunity to succeed.

Although the women showed interest in certain sectors because these jobs would allow them to set their own schedules and work around the needs of their family (e.g. drop-off and pick-up of children), access to other programming was largely limited to skilled immigrants such as those entering Canada as economic immigrants. Many of the program managers described how there is programming available to assist newcomers gain more technical skills and branch out into higher waged positions however, refugee women rarely met the eligibility criteria. For instance, Farzana's women's settlement agency partnered with a local college to offer free upgrading courses which, would eventually lead to enrollment in a program of the women's choosing at the college if they passed. To be accepted into the program however, the women needed to pass a standardized test which meant having good English proficiency. In the end, of the 25 enrolled women in the program, only skilled immigrants were accepted while not a single refugee was eligible. Similarly, Karina, an employment counselor for an ethno-specific organization, describes the difference between refugees and skilled immigrants and how that translates into different programming and thus employment outcomes:

So these women [non-refugees] with better computer skills and office skills, they are referred to this program [name of program]... We get four positions every year [to the program]... [But] most of them [refugee women] because of their low language skills and then their general skills...for sewing, general labour, restaurant work [are not referred to the program].

Employment with pre-existing ties or connections

The women's experience with settlement agencies shaped their employment prospects, and this relationship was mediated by pre-existing ties with employers in the area. Since many were arriving with low language levels, financial constraints, among other barriers, the women were

often limited in their job opportunities and so referred to low-skilled, low-waged positions by self-interested settlement agencies. Almost all of the organizations in our study relied on provincial or federal funding to remain operational which meant they needed to strategically partner with external organizations. As lines describes below, her organization is constantly trying to make connections in the community which she believes is a win-win for her and newcomers:

...we have our own connection with a private sector who—community businesses that they are looking for a new employees and then because the language might be very hard for them [refugees] to get introduced to the main stream job opportunities. So, what we do, we are sending them over [to the businesses] where the language is not very hard for them [lower language requirement]...This is how we build partnership with our private sector and they are helping us securing jobs for the newcomers.

These partnerships however usually come with a catch. The positions are typically subsidized, half paid by the employer and the other half by the organization or government, with no room for advancement and often in positions the women take on out of financial necessity. Bella, a young, willing, and soon to be college student, describes her frustration when her settlement counselor pushed her into such a position and then ultimately was dismissive to her requests for a better job.

...they gave us list of the jobs... It's just restaurants and all the bad place that I don't want to work like all the fast food...I said I'm not interested in all of this, I want you to find something else. Like I just spent the whole march break with you guys to find a job for me, and you didn't do anything. They were like if you're interesting in this job, we can help you. You know why they can help me with this specific job? Because they know the manager and they can talk to them, and they just going to hire me like immediately. I said I want to work with malls. She [settlement worker] was like okay if you want to work in malls, it's kind of hard. [She said] If you want this job, you can have a job. If you don't want this job, we can't find a job for you like in the place that you want. I was very mad.

Despite the fact that some women in our sample were highly educated, had some language proficiency, and prior work experience, many of the employer connections provided to these

women by agencies were in labour positions. This translated to a downward occupational trajectory for the women. In this quote, Jackie describes downward occupational move in the context of refugee men but she relates the scenario as similar to women as well:

So, I'll get somebody who's a plumber for example back in Syria, and now all I have is, because he cannot work as a plumber in Canada or a mechanic, or whatever, you name it. Now all I have is a job at a factory so it's like there's that discrepancy.

The jobs offered were also largely gendered, with women sent to food, tailoring, or factory jobs while, according to both the women and settlement workers, men were offered trade positions.

Beyza, a refugee women with an architectural university degree, describes how the employment agency worked off a roster of employers, all who offered subpar positions that did not align with her background. When issues of commuting intersected, she was not able to take any of these positions on, and instead is actively seeking for employment on her own.

...All the work that they [employment agency] were offering, it was something that you can find by yourself... [For example] they found me a job, it's from 12 in the evening to 6 o'clock in the morning at [hardware store]. A job in a bakery at Mississauga, very far places. I'm not very demanding, believe me...but all the jobs they were very far. You need a car or I'm not interested [in these jobs]... if it was the retail at Fairview mall or any other mall, I would accept it. But, I don't know Mississauga or outside the GTA...

In addition to referrals to low-skilled, low-waged positions that were not easily accessible, many of the women were recruited directly from settlement agencies by employers seeking cheap labour. This sometimes resulted in false promises and wasted effort for the women while settlement agencies again benefit from partnerships with different employers in the area. Specifically, in collaborating with employers, these organizations are able to reach more newcomers, increasing their efficiency and thereby strengthening their applications for future funding. Alia, a teacher and librarian in Syria, describes how she felt hopeless when she was promised a job with an employer who had ties to her settlement counselor but, in the end, was

cut from the short-list of employees for having low language proficiency even though this was not fully disclosed at the beginning.

At the end of the two weeks [of language training with employer], the employer said I'm sorry, I'm not going to take you. We are going to take only Level 5 and 6 English...I was shocked. At the beginning they said English is not a big matter as long as you have at least Level 2. And then I think they [employers] don't have credibility. So here I thought Canadian don't lie, but I think they did now. So we went to school every day from 11 until 3 o'clock for two weeks. So we were told by the end of this two weeks, you will sign a contract, but we didn't. This is affect on us a lot. Negatively (interpreter translated).

These employers are typically seeking the bare minimum when it comes to language and essentially, just want to see the job get done. By reaching out to settlement organizations, they have access to a pool of willing workers as well as counselors who are available to assist in the hiring process as described by Karina:

I had a client who couldn't speak a word of English like very low, but then she took all her work samples like she had some clothes, some embroidery and stuff, and then she took it to the interview with (clothing manufacturer), and I was there to —they're having on-site interview, and then even she couldn't talk, speak English, but they accepted her and she's still working there...and then there are women with higher language skills and then other skills, computer skills and all those technical skills, but, they are referred to different places, depends on their skills and then some are more sufficient than others. And then they need a little bit of guidance compared to others.

3.4 Discussion

Our study showed the multiple and complex ways in which settlement agencies impacted employment integration of refugees not only in terms of programs and supports provided but also in how they are structured. Specifically, the Syrian refugee women described the poor quality of services they were provided, often being shuffled between settlement organizations, each of whom had differing priorities and agendas. As a result, many of the women were referred to low-skilled, low-waged employment positions, and sometimes volunteer roles, in feminized occupations. The barriers associated with employment integration were particularly visible and

highlighted the need to incorporate the women's competing demands when addressing their employment trajectories. These barriers included those commonly researched (e.g. language) but also issues such as childcare and lack of transportation that interfered with their job search.

In Canada and many similar jurisdictions, delivery of programs and services for newcomers is a shared responsibility between federal, provincial, and municipal governments. While governments fund income supports as well as orientation and language training, the majority of all other services (e.g. employment, housing, health) are subcontracted to third parties (nonprofit organizations including migrant-led organizations) governed by short-term competitive program-based contracts (Shields, Drolet, and Valenzuela, 2016). Under these contracts, government funders are able to control the services imparted and establish future funding conditions based on those organizations delivering best practices and results. Non-profit organizations, then, find themselves in a constant struggle between their accountability to newcomer clients versus government funders (Shields et al., 2016). Particularly, their goal of representing newcomer needs and interests is shadowed by their responsibility to government arms in the context of efficient and budget-conscious program delivery to ensure further funding.

Advantages and disadvantages to government-nonprofit partnerships do exist. Multi-jurisdictional program delivery means that newcomers have access to a variety of services that are close to home (Siemiatycki and Triadafilopoulous, 2010). This includes access to ethno-specific nonprofit organizations who have emerged as instrumental in accessing vulnerable newcomer groups by catering to the sensitive needs of, and cultural backgrounds, of the local community (George, 2002; Cullen, 2009). In the case of our participants, many of our key informants were from ethno-specific organizations, typically serving Arab newcomers that includes Syrian refugees while the women were also accessing programs at these organizations

(programs such as language training, child and family services, employment advise). The women described how engaging in programs with other Syrian women gave them a sense of belonging and shared community which helped fill the gap of separation from family and friends back home. This sense of belonging is a second advantage of these organizations that are trying to foster new networks for newcomers in a foreign country. However, in the context of program delivery, this often translated into offering ‘social enterprise’ programs in largely gendered fields, such as catering, with no real employment prospects for the women. Program managers in our study found uptake in these social enterprise programs to be relatively high yet, viability of these skills in the Canadian labour market is low in comparison to other sectors. For instance, current job market trends indicate that vacancies are highest in sales and service as well as trades and transportation occupations (Statistics Canada, 2018) but our current programming is not geared toward labour market needs. This is interesting since the women were open to different employment opportunities, mostly to gain Canadian work experience, but were instead directed to deskilled, gendered positions.

This relationship has also been considered from the standpoint of disadvantaged settlement organizations that are economically dependent on government funds needed for survival. To remain competitive, organizations need to think of clever tactics to promote their relevance, which may mean collaborating with other organizations in the geographic area that offer complementary or different services. From a profit stance, governments’ gain from wider outreach to newcomer groups and efficiency of settlement agencies (Cordero-Guzman, Martin, Quiroz-Bercerra, & Theodor, 2008). However, service delivery may subsequently be compromised. Our study indicated that these structural practices may contribute to the low-waged, low-skilled jobs and job referrals experienced by the Syrian refugee women. Namely, the

women detailed being shuffled between organizations for different needs and by organizations to pre-existing employer connections, often increasing their mobility burden (Premji, 2017) and challenging their familial responsibilities.

A number of women either worked without pay to improve their language proficiency or were exploited by these agency's pre-existing ties to fill the vacancies of cheap labour. This was especially apparent when the women described their lack of knowledge about navigating the Canadian employment system. For many, the very concept of paid employment was different from how they practiced work in Syria. Starting a business, for instance, was relatively easy in Syria while in Canada, regulations, licensing, promotion, and capital hindered any prospects. So, the women were more receptive to taking on positions offered through settlement agencies even though it may come as a mismatch to their skills and qualifications.

The unequal relationship between funding and settlement organizations also came through the quality of services rendered to refugee women. The criteria imposed by funding usually prioritizes the tasks of government namely, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of programs and services (Richmond and Shields, 2004; Baines, Campey, Cunningham, & Shields, 2014). These do not always match newcomer needs and can force settlement organizations to deviate from their client-focus (Shields et al., 2015). Funding is also often insufficient to cover full programming costs and settlement organizations are then expected to make do with what they have (Shields et al., 2016). For many of the employment counselors in our study, this meant greater workloads and lack of follow-up with newcomer clients while the refugee women expressed frustration with the lack of one-on-one engagement by settlement workers. To compensate for the prolonged employment process, some women took matters into their own

hands by exhausting other employment agencies, personal connections through sponsors, or cold handing out of resumes at any opportunity.

Finally, there appears to be issues with outreach and promotion of these programs and services to the very clients they hope to reach. In a recent evaluation of government-funded settlement agencies, nearly one-third of refugee respondents felt information about employment-related help was missing and interviews with service providers revealed that available services were not being promoted effectively at the onset, forcing these organizations to develop their own promotion strategies (IRCC, 2018). In our study, the women described going through an intake process with settlement workers where employment was not usually a priority topic. This is another surprising finding given that newcomers who access settlement agencies tend to integrate more quickly into society than those who do not and that among the most vulnerable groups, the benefit is highest (Shields et al., 2016). The presumption here is that employment options are typically discussed when meeting a settlement counselor yet, the women in our study did not have the same experience. As a result, some women were clueless about the employment opportunities available to them and instead were forced to rely on social assistance.

Our study suggests interconnections between immigrant status, employment, and social structures in the context of settlement agencies in Canada. Our findings suggest that employability of refugees is not only shaped by individual factors as commonly cited but also through the quality of programs and services they access upon arrival. Accordingly, our findings highlight policy implications that should be considered to improve employment integration of refugees. First, there is a need for settlement organizations to mobilize and engage in capacity building to serve the multitude of refugee settlement needs. This would entail looking beyond two-way partnerships of organizations for the purpose of employment referrals but rather an

integrated hub of services that fall under one large institution. Governments may be more inclined to fund such a consortium (Sidhu and Taylor, 2009) and newcomers may benefit from a ‘one-stop shop’ saving on time and transportation.

Our findings also highlight the need for specialized services for refugees and other vulnerable newcomers rather than homogenized programming that is inclusive of all immigrant categories. Given the rushed nature of their departure and lack of social ties, refugees face a difficult integration process that extends to employment. For example, refugees tend to take on more precarious, low-skilled positions as compared to other immigrants and when gender intersects, women fare worse, becoming either under or unemployed (Premji and Shakya, 2017). Participants in our study, however, mentioned that programming available to them was recreational while the programs geared toward securing a job had various barriers that prevented them from enrolling. Thus, the design of programs needs to change to a more equitable approach that targets these barriers while providing access to decent employment. Refugee women consistently felt there was a lack of in-depth, one-on-one interactions between themselves and settlement workers resulting in minimal to no follow-up and passing off to other organizations. To address high workloads and tight deadlines that will likely increase as more and more refugees arrive, funding schemes need to consider a budget for additional personnel such as transition assistants as well as job developers as mentioned in our study. Additionally, with the rise of cross-organizational partnerships, agencies should consider instituting language training or the use of interpreters to facilitate employment program uptake, in-house childcare, as well as providing transit fare or subsidizing transportation costs on employment program days.

Table 3.1 Syrian refugee women sociodemographic information

Syrian women (n=20)		
		Number (%)
Age	18-25 years	5 (25)
	26-45 years	10 (50)
	46-65 years	5 (25)
Language spoken	English	8 (40)
	Arabic	12 (60)
Resettlement stream	Government-sponsored	12 (60)
	Private sponsorship	4 (20)
	Blended visa referral	2 (10)
	Refugee claimant	2 (10)
Length of time in Canada	1-2 years	11 (55)
	More than 2 years	9 (45)
Pre-migration work status	Not working	5 (25)
	Working	15 (75)
Work status in Canada	Not working, not looking for work	6
	Not working, actively searching for work	8
	Working	4
	Given up looking for work	2

Table 3.2 Key informant sociodemographic information

Key informants (n=9)			
Pseudonym	Gender	Type of organization	Role
Joshua	Male	Non-profit employment agency	Founder and CEO
Iines	Female	Non-profit, ethno-specific organization	Program manager
Karina	Female	Non-profit ethno-specific organization	Employment counselor
Sada	Female	Non-profit ethno-specific organization	Executive director
Jackie	Female	Non-profit settlement organization	Employment counselor
Marie	Female	Non-profit employment agency	Employment counselor
Lisa	Female	Non-profit settlement organization	Project director
Barb	Female	Non-profit women's settlement organization	Senior manager
Farzana	Female	Non-profit women's settlement organization	Senior manager

Chapter 4

Employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women arriving through Canada's varied refugee protection programs

Status: Under Review in Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies

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Abstract

This article examines the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women arriving to Canada through four common refugee streams: government-assisted, privately sponsored, blended-visa referral, and as refugee claimants. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugee women and key informants, we show how differences between streams – eligibility requirements, supports provided, services rendered – facilitate or act as barriers to seeking out and securing employment. The findings suggest that government-assisted refugee women struggled the most when compared to other refugee women. Particularly, GAR women arrived with part of their families and minimal supports, affecting their mental well-being and job search. Meanwhile, the other refugee women typically arrived with the qualities (language, work experience) needed to integrate and so, were able to choose when, how and the type of work they secured. Through this study, we propose policy recommendations that should be incorporated within the Canadian refugee system to mediate challenges and promote a positive resettlement experience for *all* refugees.

Keywords: Syrian refugee; Canada; employment; refugee program; gender

4.1 Introduction

Among all newly arrived immigrants in Canada, refugees tend to have the greatest difficulty finding and securing work. The rushed nature of their departure often means they lack a job offer or career plan in the host country and so, find themselves disadvantaged upon arrival (Desiderio, 2016). The 2006 Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), for example, found that

nearly two years post-settlement, refugees were the least likely immigrant group to find work (44% participation by refugees versus 72% by economic immigrants) (Xue, 2006). The jobs that were available to refugees did not commensurate with their background, with many refugees citing barriers stemming from a lack of language proficiency and Canadian work experience (Xue, 2006). More recently, the Western Canadian Settlement survey, surveying refugees arriving between 2008 and 2012 found that refugees were prone to take on precarious employment positions (part-time, temporary, short-term contracts) characterized by low-wage, low-skill, and insecurity (Wilkinson, Garcea, & Bucklaschuk, 2015). Specifically, one quarter of refugees in this sample held precarious positions as of 2013 while 80 per cent of economic immigrants secured permanent positions (Wilkinson, Garcea, & Bucklaschuk, 2015).

Research aimed at explaining downward employment outcomes of refugees point to a number of labour market barriers that often intersect simultaneously to disadvantage refugees. Difficulties with English language comprehension in addition to navigating a new employment system has been linked to underemployment in resettled refugees in the US (Sienkiewicz et al., 2013). Similarly, foreign credentials and work experience were discriminated against by employers (Stewart et al., 2008; Wilkinson et al., 2016). As well, refugees turning to settlement services to assist with their job search found themselves placed in low skilled jobs usually with employers with whom these organizations have pre-existing ties (Senthana et al., in press). While these barriers extend across all immigrants, women continue to experience these more acutely.

Gender, Refugees, and Employment

Gender has been found to play a major role in shaping employment integration with refugee women getting hired at lower rates than their male counterparts (Grenier and Xue, 2011). Some

studies suggest this may be because of inexperience in the workforce either by choice or by necessity (e.g. women who cannot afford childcare) as well as gender-role attitudes in their home country (Franz, 2003; Kristyn and Hou, 2013). Particularly, refugees emigrating from countries with less equitable attitudes about employment for women may, in turn, be less inclined to participate in the host country labour market. Yet, many women will seek employment out of financial necessity (Young and Chan, 2015). This involves navigating not only labour market barriers but managing their familial role as well (Premji et al., 2014).

In one study, women's overwhelming domestic responsibilities coupled with lack of transportation prevented them from securing safe and secure employment. Their partner's unwillingness to share in caregiving duties further limited the women's ability to upgrade credentials and kept them in a perpetual cycle of disadvantage (Reid and LeDrew, 2013). Similarly, in their study of racialized immigrant and refugee women, Premji and Shakya (2017) found that the women experienced numerous barriers to employment (e.g. non-recognition of foreign credentials, discrimination, language barriers, limited professional networks, and barriers to information and services access) as well as *triple workdays* when paid, unpaid (ie. household and caregiving work), and volunteering roles intersected. Volunteer positions were often used to gain Canadian work experience but typically did not lead to the anticipated permanent paid positions. Rather the women found themselves balancing their competing roles to the detriment of their health (Premji and Shakya, 2017).

Although the research literature touches upon barriers faced by refugees and refugee women in securing employment, it is rarely, if at all, situated within the context of how the women arrive to Canada, particularly with regards to their resettlement stream. The proceeding

section will describe Canada's resettlement program drawing from the Syrian refugee population, which is the population of interest in this study.

Canadian Refugee Protection Program

To date, nearly 58,000 Syrian refugees have resettled in Canada since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 (IRCC, 2018). This is double the usual acceptance rate of 23,000 refugees annually as the Canadian government decided to expand the refugee program to accommodate the refugee crisis (Labman and Pearlman, 2018). Half of those resettled are women who enter the country through four major streams – the first three of which encompass the humanitarian resettlement program and the fourth the in-Canada asylum program:

- Government-assisted refugee program (GAR): Refugees are identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from outside Canada and supported entirely by the federal government's resettlement assistance program.
- Private Sponsorship of refugee program (hereafter referred to as Private Sponsorship or Privately Sponsored): Refugees are identified from outside Canada and supported by private sponsor groups. Private sponsors can include organizations that are sponsorship agreement holders – religious organizations, ethno cultural groups, which have formal agreements with the federal government; constituent groups; groups of 5 or more Canadian citizens; and community sponsors such as for-profit/not-for-profit organizations.
- Blended visa office-referred program (hereafter referred to as Blended Visas): Refugees are identified by the UNHCR and matched with private sponsors. This program is a joint venture between the government and private sponsors that seeks to cost-share by equally incurring financial responsibility for the refugee(s).

- A special class of refugees, Refugee Claimants, differ from the above three since these refugees enter through the in-Canada asylum program. Refugee Claimants arrive by their own means and make a claim for asylum *within* Canada or at one of the borders (Jackson and Bauder, 2013). Further, unlike other streams, Refugee Claimants are not eligible for financial support until a decision is made on their case.

Table 4.1 provides a more detailed description and comparison of the different requirements, supports (financial and in-kind), and services provided through each program.

The proportion of Syrian refugees arriving under the programs differ significantly. While the numbers of GAR and Privately Sponsored refugees are relatively the same (27,000 GARs and 26,000 Privately Sponsored as of August 31, 2018), the Blended Visa program resettled a fraction of that with 4,000 Syrians and Refugee Claimants comprised the least with 560 Syrians reported under this scheme at the end of 2018 (IRCC, 2018). These programs, excluding Refugee Claimants, are designed to support refugees for a limited time (typically one year), after which refugees are expected to become self-sufficient by seeking out and securing employment.

While employment integration of refugees has received some scholarly attention, few studies have examined this exclusively among refugee women. Rather, research has addressed barriers to employment and economic outcomes of refugees more generally, seldom considering the multiple and complex ways in which refugee women may be disadvantaged in the labour market. Our study therefore sought to examine the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women in Southern Ontario while exploring how labour market barriers, social and gendered roles, and resettlement stream underpin their experience.

4.2 Methods

This research was guided by a feminist grounded theory approach (Wuest, 1995). Feminist grounded theory combines feminist modes of enquiry with grounded theory. Here, issues of subjugation and power, which have typically been ignored in male-centric research, are unearthed through women's multiple experiences and social positions (Wuest, 1995). Women are the knowledge knowers and theory is grounded and emerges from their accounts rather than from existing theory. Feminist grounded theory is concerned with social change and/or social transformation. Rather than simply describing what is occurring, a conceptual picture of why and how something is the way it is becomes apparent. In this study, the different factors that influence employment and their interrelationships, described via interviews with the women and key informants, highlight challenges to employment integration post-migration and provide suggestions for ways to overcome them.

Sample and Recruitment

Participants in the study were Syrian refugee women over 18 years of age who had arrived as Refugee Claimants or through the GAR, Private Sponsorship or Blended Visa program. To participate in this study, the women must have lived in Canada for a minimum of one year, since this is when income supports by the government or private sponsors usually end, prompting refugees to seek employment. As the study was focused on understanding the multiple and complex experiences of refugee women, we targeted women who were seeking work, currently working (in any employment position), or had given up searching for work all together.

Women could participate in English or, with the help of a translator, in their native language of Arabic. The option to participate in Arabic helped reduce barriers to participation and allowed the women to engage in a language with which they were most comfortable. More

than one-half of the women chose to participate in Arabic and of these, most were government-assisted refugees.

Refugee women were primarily recruited using recruitment ads that were sent, via email, to settlement workers at a number of settlement agencies in Southern Ontario. Settlement workers were individuals who worked closely with newcomers to facilitate integration and particularly employment integration. This included employment counselors and program administrators as well as upper management (director or CEO) of settlement agencies. Settlement workers were instrumental in advertising the study to potential participants who may be eligible and interested. These same settlement workers were simultaneously approached to participate as key informants in the study. Snowballing ensued where one key informant suggested the names of other key informants. Some refugee women were also recruited through social media by examining Facebook pages of 3 to 4 newcomer organizations with open listserv of their members. Using the member list, we sent a private message to women we believed were Syrian (e.g. women with Arabic names or postings on their Facebook page that were in Arabic), which outlined the study purpose and contact details. In total, 20 Syrian refugee women and 9 key informants participated in the study (Table 4.2).

Interviews

One-time, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women and key informants between March and September 2018. The one-on-one nature of the interviews allowed us to explore the meaning women attached to employment as well as probe into their aspirations and long-term goals in Canada. Key informants shared their knowledge about refugees and challenges with integrating them in a new labour market. Author 1 conducted all interviews in English while Arabic interviews occurred with Author 1 and an informal interpreter

who worked at a settlement agency and offered to help with the study. Interviews took place at a time and location convenient to the participants and typically lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Venues convenient for the Syrian women included cafés, settlement agencies, or their homes while key informants preferred their place of employment. Four interviews were done by phone. Syrian refugee women were given an honorarium of \$50 in appreciation of their time as well as feedback letters with our contact details should they wish to reach out with further questions, concerns, or to request the study results. The women also had the option of contacting the interpreter to gauge how the study was progressing and whether results were available, if they felt more comfortable speaking with someone familiar or in the case of Arabic speaking women.

Feminist reflexive interviewing was employed throughout the interview process. Feminist reflexivity posits that a researcher acknowledges his or her realities and lived experiences but does not allow them to interfere with participant accounts and meanings (Hesse-Biber, 2006). Thus, any preconceived notions around refugee women's employment that can affect the creation of knowledge was identified to ensure that the women's voices were represented, listened to, and understood throughout the research process. In this study, SS had minimal prior biases regarding refugee employment integration as she is not a refugee and did not experience the same life events as the Syrians including war or being forced to leave her home country. However, as a racialized woman, she understands it is slightly more difficult to secure employment and so, felt sympathetic to the women's stories.

All interviews were audio recorded and a professional transcriptionist transcribed English portions of the interviews. Transcribed text was entered into NVivo (QSR International, 2012), a qualitative software program that allows for coding and analyzing of interview data. Detailed

field notes were also written after each interview to describe the encounter, note observations of meeting context (interaction and behaviour), and record analytic insights.

Analysis

Data analysis followed a modified ground theory approach (Charmez, 2006) which involved systemic coding, constant comparison, and deviant case analysis to conceptualize the women's employment experience since arriving in Canada.

First, a handful of transcribed interviews were read and re-read independently by two of the authors (SS and EM) to familiarize with, and immerse themselves in, the data. Second, the same authors developed an initial coding framework that distinguished between descriptive and analytic coding. Descriptive codes were predetermined codes from previous literature and which reflected issues within the immediate domain of the interview questions. Analytic codes emerged from the data, as interview findings progressed beyond the expected categories in the interview guide. This coding framework was then applied to each interview by Author 1 and periodically reviewed by the research team to identify discrepancies in analysis for discussion. The iterative interplay between data collection and analysis allowed for emergence of new codes, which were back-coded to all transcripts. Coded summaries were then created to distill findings and facilitate in-depth analysis of key themes within and across the data. Code summaries are a written summary of each code which identified distinctive features of each interview and analytic issues and comments including how aspects of an interview compared with others.

This study received ethical approval from the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In the case of Arabic speaking women, the interpreter went

through the consent form in-detail with the women prior to the interview to obtain consent. No personal identifiers were used in this study and each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

4.3 Findings

The findings in this study elucidate the different experiences of women in relation to their refugee stream, and in relation to the varied obstacles faced by the women in seeking out and securing employment. Namely, GAR women were more likely to experience negative mental health effects stemming from separation from family members and experienced fewer opportunities to showcase their skillset in the labour market due to lack of language proficiency and credentials. Privately Sponsored, Blended Visa, and Refugee Claimants however tended to arrive with better language, education and work experience, which allowed them more choices in relation to when and in what capacity they entered the labour market. As well, these same women had stronger social support networks than GARs, which further facilitated their employment and social integration. Simultaneous intersections between different aspects of the women's lives are considered throughout.

Mental health and family role

The interviews with refugee women highlighted the range of events experienced and subsequent changes in their family role as they transitioned through the different stages of migration. The women described how separation from family, such as adult children, and the burden of household responsibility as they shifted from homemaker to provider, caused them stress and anxiety. While some of the women were able to develop coping mechanisms including keeping busy by attending available programs (e.g. language programs), others were unable to bear the separation and shift in responsibility, and these pressures prevented them from actively seeking out employment.

Under Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, a family is defined as up to two adults and their non-adult children (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez, 2017). By this definition, large, extended families can become separated through the GAR program. The Private Sponsorship program, however, provides a de facto pathway to keep families together given that sponsorship groups, sometimes including up to 25 members who collectively provide strong financial support, may choose to sponsor those family members who fall outside of the 'nuclear family'.

Many of the GAR women in this study had arrived in Canada with only part of their family, leaving behind key members such as spouses, siblings, and in some cases adult children. This was the case for Amine who arrived with only one of her three adult children. In Syria, she had owned a successful catering business after her husband passed away and each of her children had flourishing careers as well. She describes how the separation and ongoing fear for the safety of her family leaves her feeling anxious and worried:

My thoughts always here and there. It's been more than 4 years I haven't seen my children... So my focus and my dreams is about them... I felt that my body is down... I felt that my body is not supporting me. So, I'm still-think I'm mentally not in my thought [Interpreter translated]...

In some instances, the women expressed a strong sense of dependency on their spouses to support their families financially. They noted that while in their home country, they were accustomed to being taken care of and their role was primarily in the home (preparing meals, caring for children). When the women arrived without their husbands, who stayed in Syria to look after their home, some found it difficult to switch family roles from homemaker to provider when their situation (governmental income supports ceased after 12 months) made it necessary to actively seek out employment. Maya, for instance, arrived without her husband and was able to secure a casual, part-time job at an Arabic restaurant with the help of her friend. Although she

considers herself lucky when compared to other refugee women, she feels that the job and her lower quality in life have affected her feelings of self-worth.

They give me hours when almost the restaurant should be closed. So I prepare everything to get everything done including like clean dishes, a lot of washing dishes, and then it gets very messy everywhere. This is I can like tolerate but the thing that make feel mentally like I am not feeling good about is when I has to clean the washrooms and clean the floor [Interpreter translated].

GARs had often experienced periods of displacement within Syria as well as months or years living in bordering countries. Many of these women and their families did not want to accept having to leave Syria and believed that, eventually, things would get better and they could return home. The women described harsh living and working conditions (e.g. long working hours, low pay, physically laborious jobs) and discrimination by nationals during their migration between bordering countries. They spoke of nationals from Turkey and Lebanon, for instance, who believed Syrians were competing for already scarce jobs. All of this created an anxious and stressful employment environment. When the political situation in Syria did not improve and the women ultimately decided to apply for resettlement in Canada through UNHCR, they hoped their luck had changed. However, they were disappointed when they arrived in Canada and continued to experience barriers to employment. The women described how available positions in Canada were precarious and insecure, such as on-call jobs, prompting some to give up looking for work and instead, to rely on the low but more stable income provided by government social assistance benefits. For instance, Alia turned her focus to supporting the next generation, her children, rather than continuing her job search as she found it exhaustive to keep searching with no promise of employment.

There is no emotional support. I lost the trust with anybody here in Canada. From the very first day, I don't have good experience... So, I think I'm done... My focus is my children. They have lot of potential. I want to support them. So I don't want to lose my children again so this is affect me again negatively [Interpreter translated].

While many of the government-assisted women described struggling when they first arrived in Canada, a few found ways to calm their fears by keeping busy. For example, some women described loading their days with language classes, healthcare appointments for themselves or family members, or programs with their children to distract them from thinking about displaced family members. Others connected with refugee-serving settlement organizations and were able to meet other Syrian women in the community, which they described as an outlet to share stories and experiences in a common and familiar space.

Language, education, and work experience as key determinants of employment

Key determinants of employment include language proficiency, recognized credentials, as well as relevant work experience. All of these are known to increase a newcomer's chance of securing employment (Wilkinson and Garcea, 2017). Women in this study arriving through the Private Sponsorship or as Refugee Claimants typically possessed one or more of these qualities and so, had higher decision-making latitude when it came to when and how they searched for jobs and what employment offers to accept.

In our study, three of the four Privately Sponsored women were either working or had been offered employment within one year of their arrival. These women had good English proficiency and were highly educated (college or university degree). They were able to leverage job connections through a variety of means such as networking, via sponsors, by approaching key members in the Canadian community, handing out resumes, or applying online. The women described how their resumes underlined their extensive work experience in professional settings and, this together with their English proficiency, led to job offers almost immediately after starting their job search, albeit in positions that did not commensurate with their background.

...the manager saw me, he said to me we need a cashier. Come tomorrow. Without interview, without anything. So I went and I started the training, and I got the job. I was working part-time as a Manager Assistant at [grocery store]...So I worked there for one year. I get my job without interview, without application, without assessment, without connection, without nothing. It was just come tomorrow (Beyza, privately sponsored).

Another Privately Sponsored refugee woman turned down a job offer at a well-known retail store to focus on her education. Roula's entry is interesting in that she came through a private sponsorship route that funds student-run committees to welcome refugee students. This pathway is especially attractive since it not only offers refugees protection and support but also access to Canadian post-secondary education (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez, 2017). With this program, her living and tuition expenses were covered, which allowed her to focus on school and her long-term work prospects. Roula went on to describe the ease of the job application process, when compared to other refugee categories, and that she will likely apply for work again once she adapts to balancing her university workload:

I always carry my resume, and I just drop it and I ask the manager, and she said okay. You can apply on-line. I applied, and they send me email, okay, we accept you. Come in for interview for 10 minutes, and I said okay. After that, I changed my mind... Because, you know, I really I have to study very hard to pass my exams, but if I work, I can't. I will spend all the time in the store.

Similar to Privately Sponsored refugees, Refugee Claimants found ease in securing employment or consciously decided to forgo opportunities that came up to focus on other priorities. Refugee Claimants typically seek asylum in a developed country such as Canada because they have the financial means to travel and because they are travelling to where their family and friends are already settled (Spinks, 2013). This was the case for Hannie, a Refugee Claimant who arrived with her husband and four children and who had previously worked as a teacher in Syria. She was offered a few positions at Arabic restaurants because of her strong English but did not take any up because she felt that would be a downward occupational move. Hannie's friend lived and worked in Canada as a teacher and Hannie described learning a lot

about the teaching system from her and the process of upgrading her teaching diploma. She decided to take her friend's advice and to wait until her youngest child started school (in about one year) and then go back to school herself to upgrade her credentials to be able to teach pre-school in Canada. Unlike Hannie, Yala, another Refugee Claimant, seized the opportunity that presented itself when she attended a local job fair at the advice of a friend. Here, she was able to secure a part-time job as a college professor when the employer took a chance on her due to her experience working with the database needed for the course.

I never worked as a teacher before... I have 20 years' experience on [system specific to travel and tourism]...but I never had a class with students and experience stuff so I am very thankful for having the opportunity to try something new, you know, and I think I did well on it because the feedback came well. And I was asked again to teach other courses.

While the presence of language, education and work experience appeared to enhance the employment opportunities of Privately Sponsored and Refugee Claimants, a lack of these qualities appeared to thwart employment of GAR women. Language, education or work experience may be missing in GARs because, unlike other streams, GARs are accepted into Canada based on 'vulnerability' (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez, 2017). Here, vulnerability includes domains relating to presence of children, health concerns, social circumstances (time in refugee camps), and trauma/torture (Bécharde and Elgersma, 2011; UNHCR and IDC, 2016). These women also tended to have fewer resources at their disposal or the support of extended family and friends. Zarah is a prime example of how these relationships manifested in job prospects. Her primary role in Syria was caring for her five young children while her husband held a steady job in the auto industry. Since arriving in Canada, mounting expenses and her sheer boredom of staying at home without any family or friends prompted her to search for a job. She started by handing out her resume to local businesses, such as home renovation stores, that were

within walking distance to her home since she lacked any modes of transportation but found she was always getting the same feedback: she needed to improve her English language skills. In addition, she was only able to work odd hours during the day so she could be home for her children before and after school. She also had some personal barriers to overcome with respect to working around men:

I think my English is not good enough to find a job for me... the employer make it very hard to accept us. I need at least level for example, Level 4 or Level 5... Beside my son is not in school so when my son in the school next year, I'll have more freedom to [look]...Now I'm thinking a lot. I like to work in a kitchen. I think working in an environment a lot of guys, I'm not feeling comfortable to work in a lot of ... So, I like something as a mom would be good for me [Interpreter translated].

Discomfort working around men emerged as a somewhat common theme among the women, presumably related to their gendered role in Syria. Interestingly, the women, irrespective of resettlement stream, did not allow this to stop them from pursuing jobs. For some, this social integration was to serve as an example to their children. For others, this acceptance was an inevitable part of adapting to a new country.

Where paid employment opportunities were not easily accessible, volunteering offered refugee women a possible entry point in the labour market. A number of GAR women sought out volunteer positions to manage their employment-related shortcomings. They believed that volunteering would help them to acquire soft skills, expand social networks, and provide opportunities to practice English language and that this would lead to transitioning to paid employment. However, the women in this study described the volunteer route as ineffective after being at some organizations and still unemployed after 6 months, which speaks to their eagerness to integrate.

Key informants similarly described differences in employment integration with respect to the refugee stream. For instance, employment counselors found it easier to match Privately

Sponsored refugees to jobs because they arrived with skillsets (e.g. language and education) that were needed and were more familiar with the job process, likely through the help of their Canadian sponsors. Conversely, they found it difficult to work with GAR women because they required targeted training and assistance to tackle each obstacle before they were job ready. As well, they described the GAR women as limited to part-time jobs largely due to their childcare responsibilities:

Not many of them (refugees) are working. When they come here, most of them haven't even finished high school. So once they come here, and they're looking for a job. They say okay. I can work. I can find a part-time job in a corner store or something, and then the meantime I can improve my language skills [and] apply for subsidized childcare... There are several of them with those conditions...(Karina, employment counselor).

Job readiness for refugee women in the GAR stream could take anywhere from months to years. Some key informants described women's motivational level as an additional barrier to employment. Generally, women in women-led households, irrespective of refugee stream, were seen as keener to secure employment than women in male-led households.

The difference will be the men even if they are engineers or doctors, they will start with the labour job because they feel that they have to support the family, regardless what they are doing. The women take their time and find a different type of employment according to their certificates or degrees because there is no rush for them to find employment. They are not the head of the family. Now for single families like the mom is the only parent. These are more resilient. They will be looking and talking about employment since day one because they know that they are the only person to support the family, and many of them will take any job (Sada, Director of non-profit).

Social support of sponsorship groups and family/friends

The relative ease of finding work, whether low skilled, low waged or precarious in nature, for refugee groups other than GARs may partially be attributed to the supportive role of their Canadian sponsors and family and friends. Sponsors typically assume all financial responsibility for Privately Sponsored refugees and serve as a network of support around key resettlement

issues including employment. The women in our sample described how the sponsors helped them find housing, showed them around the neighbourhood, connected them with neighbours and ultimately provided the emotional support they needed in a new and foreign country. For example, Galina recalls a time when her sponsors helped her make some extra income on the side by selling her Syrian food.

...they did them advertising to their contacts several times they, through their friends they ask her to prepare food for the parties that their friends had. And one of the sponsors she said that she's trying to find them a small place to maybe sell sandwich there or at a festival [Interpreter translated].

Febe's sponsors also supported her interests by buying her a sewing machine to help jumpstart her tailoring business. In Syria, Febe was a professional tailor for brides and bridal parties and this allowed her to continue doing the same line of work in Canada. Her sponsors promoted her business to their own network of family and friends and continued to support her even after the one year:

So we became a family. So they are our relatives and we love them a lot... they love us. All our birthday party they consider, they invite us, we go over there, and they recognize us...we do the same with them... So they did for the employment and for everything, so we owed them a lot. They introduce us for everything in Canada [Interpreter translated].

Beyond the instrumental support, some of the women reflected on the sheer time their sponsors took out of their busy schedules to help them practice English in order to facilitate their integration and increase their chances of securing more steady employment.

The sponsor decided we're not going to use interpreter anymore. We need to improve your English so we will communicate without interpretation. So drawing, acting, they help a lot. And then they match me with a volunteer to teach me English, visit me twice a week for three months. She would use flash cards, write words. I start to understand... I was spoiled [by my nine sponsors]...(Tasia, Blended Visa, Interpreter translated).

In contrast to these women who had access to a vast network of sponsors, the GARs in our sample arrived in Canada having only their immediate family (or part of their family) to

depend on. Consequently, GAR women had to navigate the employment system either themselves or with the help of counselors from settlement organizations, who typically referred the women to low-skilled positions in companies with whom they had pre-existing ties (Senthanar et al., in press). These GAR women were eventually able to make new friendships in the community, mostly with other Syrian families, which widened their social network; however, this was a gradual process as they decided to participate in social programs available in the community such as cooking or maternal health classes. Meanwhile, as previously mentioned, the Refugee Claimant women already had family and friends established in Canada who were prepared for their arrival and able to support their needs. The women described how their family and friends were instrumental in streamlining the job process and providing them with the resources and tailored advice about different options such as upgrading credentials, volunteering to gain Canadian work experience, attending job fairs, and connecting them with potential employers.

4.4 Discussion

In this article, we explored the employment experiences of recently resettled Syrian refugee women In Southern Ontario, Canada. While other research has addressed refugees' labour market experiences more generally (Krahn et al., 2000; Creese and Kambere, 2003; Hou and Beiser, 2006; Tillbury and Colic-Peisker, 2007; Dhital, 2015), our study provides rich insights into how employment outcomes are framed by unique and intersecting barriers stemming from resettlement stream. Particularly, the GAR women in our study experienced greater mental health issues and often lacked language skills, education or work experience, which prevented them from securing employment. Conversely, other refugee streams including Privately Sponsored and Blended Visas were more likely to have social support networks and possess one

or a combination of the aforementioned qualities that facilitated job prospects. Gendered roles also appeared to further nudge women into low skilled or unpaid (e.g. volunteering) employment, as the women had to negotiate home and childcare responsibilities with their job search.

In Canada, refugees entering through the Private Sponsorship program are generally considered to be more effective in long-term adaptation and integration than GARs (Hyndman, 2011; Agrawal, 2018). In fact, in a recent evaluation of the Canadian resettlement programs over a ten year period (2002 to 2012), 50% of Privately Sponsored refugees found employment in their first year of arrival in comparison to 12% of GARs (IRCC, 2016). Possible reasons include the careful way in which sponsoring groups chose refugees, in many instances, through their own extended contacts (Agrawal, 2018), and to Privately Sponsored refugees' broader exposure to services and resources in the community. In a study of church groups as private sponsors, Chapman (2014) found that the majority of Privately Sponsored refugees were either known to the sponsors (friend, acquaintance) or were family-linked cases. More recently, 62% of Privately Sponsored Syrians indicated that a family member sponsored them (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016). Likewise, the Privately Sponsored refugees in this study tended to share similar characteristics with sponsors in terms of language proficiency and education and hence were job ready within months of arrival. GARs, on the other hand, are selected based on predefined criteria as outlined by the UNHCR and enforced by the federal government. The criteria emphasizes *vulnerability* rather than vocational or professional skills, which may explain their prolonged employment integration.

While we found that sponsoring groups worked closely with the women to navigate barriers and provide opportunities for employment, it is important to note that employment

options were generally limited to low skill, gendered positions. These jobs were often part-time, casual or informal jobs working in tailoring or catering for quick profit to supplement their household income. In cases of GAR women, where job searches proved unsuccessful due to overwhelming barriers, the women often approached volunteering as a means to gain Canadian work experience. Unpaid volunteering however was similarly situated in gendered areas (cashier, teaching, and restaurants) and provided minimal potential for advancement. This tendency toward, what Anderson (2000) calls “the three C’s” – cooking, cleaning, and caring – maintains deep-rooted economic inequities between men and women. It has been estimated that the wage gap between immigrant women (composite measure that includes all immigrant categories) and their male counterparts is nearly one-quarter (Hudon, 2015). Among refugees, GARS tend to have the lowest income bracket (\$18,000/year five years after arrival), converging with Privately Sponsored refugees at the ten-year mark (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2012), while gendered differences by refugee stream are unknown.

In many ways, the conditions of work and life described by the women were better in Syria, prior to the onset of the civil war, than Canada. Often, the women reported easier access to jobs, a stress-free environment, and greater opportunities to socialize in a language and space with which they were comfortable. While the women were grateful for the protection offered in Canada, the experience of leaving Syria took a toll on many of the women’s mental health and well-being. For example, concerns for the welfare of adult children, desire to reunite with family, and resettling without the “breadwinner”, were commonly reported by the GAR women.

Whereas previous research (Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, & Moreau, 2001; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2016; Miller et al., 2018) has defined familial separation along a spectrum of mental health conditions, our findings situate mental health and family separation with a new reality of

finding a job. For many of the GAR women, however, adapting to this new reality was difficult. Coupled with lack of transportation and childcare responsibilities, these women seemed to fall deeper into hopelessness even though they viewed employment as a sense of identity in Canada and were eager to prove themselves.

Proving oneself also resonated with Privately Sponsored and Blended Visas, yet to a lesser extent. These women were actively engaged in the job search but selective in their options at the same time. This meant turning down job offers or quitting a job when they felt overqualified. Under both Private Sponsorship and Blended Visas for Syrians in Canada, a family of four can receive up to CAD\$28,000 for the year (Labman and Pearlman, 2018). An unspoken yet major reason why Private Sponsorship is successful is due to the additional in-kind governmental contributions to education, healthcare, and social services both during and after the one-year immigration mark (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez, 2016). These women described how sponsors became like family, providing instrumental and, at times, financial support outside of the 12 months. As a result, they tended to have a more relaxed approach to employment and decided to invest long-term by returning to school or attending development programs available in the community with the hopes for a better job. Other research has shown, however, that sponsors may feel burdened by the demands on time (Derwing and Mulder, 2003) or unmet cultural or linguistic expectations of refugees (Beiser, 2009) suggesting that refugees may not rely wholly on sponsors. Therefore, inclusion of sponsoring groups in studies with refugees would help tease these relationships apart and should be considered in future research.

Finally, Refugee Claimants' employment experience in our study was somewhat positive in the sense that they were offered employment, albeit in short-term or part-time capacity. In Canada, Refugee Claimants occupy a space between other refugees given that they are temporary

residents (Jackson and Bauder, 2013) while they wait for their claim to be processed and decision rendered by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). During this time, they have access to a few services but are exempt from governmental income supports. Employment is crucial then for living and day-to-day expenses. However, Refugee Claimants arriving with networks in place and previous financial assets, as seen through our interviews, may not experience these constraints as acutely. Their higher motivation to securing employment may be driven by citizenship, obtaining permanent resident status, as shown in previous literature (Coates and Hayward, 2005; Jackson and Bauder, 2013).

The findings of this study should be considered in light of a number of factors. It was an exploratory study focusing on a single ethnicity of refugees within one jurisdiction, Ontario. However, the largest cohorts of Syrian refugees resettled in Southern Ontario and across all resettlement streams, ensuring a rich representative sample. Attention to Syrians provides analytic focus given their similar rushed nature of departure from the politically war-torn country of Syria. Transferability should be cautioned as the psychosocial profiles of refugees differ by country and their respective situations and so likely differ from the Syrian landscape. Canadian host country policy and practice, however, will remain the same for all resettled refugees and refugee claimants suggesting that this study can serve as a tool for recommendations.

4.5 Recommendations

Programs that involve cooperative planning and integration between governments, community agencies, sponsorship groups and employers can help to reduce the inequality faced by refugee women and provide opportunities of entry into the Canadian labour market.

For instance, Germany's 'Prototyping Transfer Program' aimed to provide refugees who lacked appropriate credentials with professional qualifications by pairing refugees with

employers for a short period of time (Böse, Tusarinow, and Wünsche, 2016). If through their supervised practice, refugees' skills aligned with what was required for the job, they would receive an equivalency certificate, which was typically recognized by employers. Applying a similar format with Canadian employers can help refugee women, without Canadian credentials but applicable skills, to 'prove themselves' as frequently mentioned in our interviews.

Bridging programs that facilitate the transition from volunteering to safe, decent employment should also be considered given that many refugee women initially choose volunteer positions to improve their language and acquire needed soft skills. In Canada, bridging programs tend to focus on highly educated immigrants, providing courses to expedite credential recognition, while lower skilled immigrants, namely refugees, do not have anything similar. The proposed bridging program can fall into a number of categories. Governments and employers, for instance, can participate in subsidized work placements or paid internships coupled with in-house language training to allow cost sharing between different authorities while helping refugees move on from unpaid volunteer routes.

Finally, Canadian predeparture policies need to see changes in what services are offered. Particularly, more intense preparation in the form of education surrounding the labour system, governmental and community supports and resources available, and matching with peers in the host country can help prepare the women for what to expect upon arrival.

4.6 Conclusion

Our study lends support to the growing body of literature addressing gendered disparities in employment of refugee populations. Specifically, it highlights the multiple and intersecting pathways to securing employment and how these differentially affect refugee women arriving through Government, Private Sponsorship, Blended Visa or as Refugee Claimants. GARs

experienced the greatest barriers to employment forcing them into unpaid, gendered sectors while Privately Sponsored and Blended Visa refugees benefitted from support of sponsors and were able to choose how and when they integrated. Findings point to the cyclical relationship between employment and social and structural contexts, which perpetuate refugee women's position in low skilled and gendered occupations.

Table 4.1 – Canada’s Refugee Programs

	Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program			In-Canada Asylum Program
	Government-assisted refugee program	Private Sponsorship of refugees	Blended Visa referral program	Refugee Claimants
Referred by:	UNHCR ⁴	Private sponsors (though government authorities must approve refugees’ application for settlement)	UNHCR	Refugee(s) arrive through own means and make a refugee claim at either port of entry or an IRCC designated office
Supported by:	Federal government through the CIC’s Resettlement Assistance Program	Private sponsors assume all financial responsibility for the refugee(s)	Equal financial responsibility between governmental Resettlement Assistance Program and private sponsors however, private sponsors cover all start-up costs	Self-sufficient
Services rendered:	Port of entry services, provision of temporary accommodations, life skills training, orientation sessions, assistance with access to other federal/provincial programs, income supports (up to 12-months).	Initial start-up costs to help refugee(s) settle in host country, emotional and social support, costs for other services similar to those offered to GARs.	Six months of financial support each from resettlement assistance program and private sponsors including housing, language classes, food, clothing, assistance with access to other federal/provincial programs	If the claim is found to be eligible, claim will be referred to IRB ⁵ and claimant will receive a Refugee Protection Claimant Document (RPCD). With the RPCD, claimants can apply for social assistance, access refugee shelters, apply for work permit, access

⁴ The UN Refugee Agency is a global organization dedicated to protecting the rights of, and building better futures, for refugees forced to flee their home country due to war, conflict, and fear of persecution.

⁵ The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada is the tribunal responsible for making informed decisions on immigrant and refugee status in Canada, in accordance with the law.

				settlement organizations (limited and varies provincially), while they await their hearing
Services delivered under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)	Basic coverage: hospital services, laboratory, diagnostic, and ambulance services Supplemental coverage: limited dental and vision, home care, long-term care, serviced by allied health care practitioners (speech language, occupational therapists etc.), assistive devices and medical supplies/equipment. Prescription drug coverage (limited)	Same as IFHP provided to GARs (up to one year)	Same as IFHP provided to GARs (up to one year)	If they have a RPCD, have access to the IFHP as the RPCD serves as a health card

Table 4.2. Syrian refugee women and key informant sociodemographic information

Syrian women (n=20)		
		Number (%)
Age	18-25 years	5 (25)
	26-45 years	10 (50)
	46-65 years	5 (25)
Language spoken	English	8 (40)
	Arabic	12 (60)
Resettlement stream	Government-sponsored	12 (60)
	Private sponsorship	4 (20)
	Blended visa referral	2 (10)
	Refugee claimant	2 (10)
Length of time in Canada	1-2 years	11 (55)
	More than 2 years	9 (45)
Pre-migration work status	Not working	5 (25)
	Working	15 (75)
Work status in Canada	Not working, not looking for work	6
	Not working, actively searching for work	8
	Working	4
	Given up looking for work	2

Key informants (n=9)			
Pseudonym	Gender	Type of organization	Role
Joshua	Male	Non-profit employment agency	Founder and CEO
Iines	Female	Non-profit, ethno-specific organization	Program manager
Karina	Female	Non-profit ethno-specific organization	Employment counselor
Sada	Female	Non-profit ethno-specific organization	Executive director
Jackie	Female	Non-profit settlement organization	Employment counselor
Marie	Female	Non-profit employment agency	Employment counselor
Lisa	Female	Non-profit settlement organization	Project director
Barb	Female	Non-profit women's settlement organization	Senior manager
Farzana	Female	Non-profit women's settlement organization	Senior manager

Chapter 5

Entrepreneurial experiences of Syrian refugee women in Canada: A feminist grounded qualitative study

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Abstract

Background & Objectives: Nearly half of the resettled Syrian refugees to Canada are women.

When labour market barriers and inexperience in paid employment intersect, these women often choose entrepreneurship as a means of survival, although this is rarely explored in the literature.

Using a qualitative research design, this study examined Syrian refugee women's experience of trying to start a business in Canada.

Methods: A total of 29 in-depth interviews were conducted with Syrian refugee women, who had been in Canada for a minimum of one year and with key informants, including employment counselors and program managers who work closely with refugees during their resettlement. A feminist grounded analysis led to the identification of systemic challenges to entrepreneurship.

Results: The women were primarily interested in starting a small business in feminized industries such as food/catering or tailoring. However, problems with access to resources, competing demands in the household, and a lack in knowledge around the Canadian labour system appeared to push the women to operate these businesses in unregulated bounds, which was not economically rewarding. Key informants, on the other hand, seemed to promote feminized entrepreneurship as a 'social enterprise' that combines social integration with market-based skills they believed the women could apply in the Canadian economy.

Conclusions: Given the long-term gap in labour market integration experienced by refugees, host countries are missing the potential economic gains offered through entrepreneurial start-ups.

Avenues for interventions are located at programming and services that address multiple and intersecting barriers among refugee women.

Keywords: Syrian refugee; entrepreneurship; gender; Canada

5.1 Introduction

The refugee crisis is unparalleled in recent times (OECD, 2015). Internationally, more than 25 million refugees were displaced from their homes in 2017 and only a fraction were granted resettlement to developed countries through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017). Upon arrival in the host country, entrepreneurship is a labour market integration option often chosen by refugees to rebuild their lives and bring about some economic stability.

Much of the research on refugee entrepreneurship has been homogenized with the experiences of other immigrants. However, while immigrants willingly leave their home in search of better opportunities, refugees are forced to leave. Their departure involves little to no planning and they leave behind much that is familiar. Labour market barriers, including lack of language proficiency, credential recognition, and discrimination, often intersect to exclude them from the formal economy in the host country. Women tend to be disproportionately affected because they are often have limited work experience either by choice or due to cultural norms and so, entrepreneurship offers a way to circumvent these barriers (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Rezaei, Goli, and Dana, 2013; Kasseeah and Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2014; Ramadani, 2015).

With nearly 58,000 Syrian refugees resettled in Canada since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, half of whom are women, entrepreneurship may be an inevitable career path for many. Yet, these women have arrived with minimal capita and, few pre-existing networks and social ties such as family, friends and other contacts and this can affect the success of their micro-enterprises. Consequently, while the benefits of entrepreneurship are clear, evidence examining refugee women's entrepreneurial activities in a context of regulation, diversity, and intricate social assistance schemes is limited. Particularly, the regulatory landscape in Canada differs significantly from Syria in terms of requirements (e.g. licenses, commercial space) to start

a business. As well, unlike Syria, refugees have access to social assistance benefits if they are unable to find work. Historically, almost half of all refugees have required social assistance two to three years after arriving (Luck, 2017).

This study explores refugee entrepreneurship in Canada through the stories of Syrian refugee women who are trying to start over in a new and foreign terrain. The study examined women's motivation for, and challenges encountered, in establishing themselves as entrepreneurs. Given that the research is situated in a post-settlement context, changes in gender roles are discussed throughout.

This article proceeds firstly by introducing existing literature on migrant entrepreneurship, highlighting the need for distinction by immigrant status and gender. Next, we provide context on the Syrian refugee influx in Canada, which forms the basis of our study. After discussing the theoretical positioning and methodology, the entrepreneurial experiences of Syrian refugee women in Canada are laid out and discussed and policy recommendations are provided.

Refugees and Entrepreneurship

The literature on migrant entrepreneurship recognizes two common elements: motivation and the informal economy. Motivation to be an entrepreneur has largely been presumed to be 'necessity-driven' or 'opportunity-driven'. It is considered necessity-driven when migrants, including refugees, enter entrepreneurship after having been excluded from the paid employment market (Minniti, Bygrave, & Autio, 2006; Dawson and Henley, 2012). Some of the reasons for their exclusion are language barriers, discrimination, and professional deskilling. Thus, to overcome these barriers, while making a living for oneself and their family, refugees are pushed toward entrepreneurship as an economic survival strategy (Sadiku-Dushi, 2019). Conversely, when

migrants realize opportunities and are willing to explore new business ventures, they are pulled toward entrepreneurship (Maritz, 2004; Smallbone and Welter, 2006).

While research has dichotomized motivation, suggesting that migrants occupy one or the other category, some scholars have begun to argue that necessity- and opportunity-driven motives may co-exist (Williams and Round, 2009) or change over time (Williams and Round, 2009; Franck, 2012).

These motives are also commonly situated within the informal economy. The informal economy, also referred to as ‘underground’, ‘hidden’, or ‘shadow’ economy, is loosely defined as a business that operates in production or trade of products and services that are typically cash-based, allowing business owners to sidestep tax or government regulation (Williams and Youssel, 2014; Ramadani et al., 2019). For instance, in their study contextualizing entrepreneurship in Jordan, Refai et al. (2018) found that refugee entrepreneurs operated within the informal economy and adopted a ‘cleft habitus’ (torn by internal division and contradiction) as they were taking risks in opening illegal businesses to survive and support family.

Entrepreneurship has typically been regarded as a necessity-driven option for migrant entrepreneurs given that it allows income generation and business activities to occur in a relatively barrier free manner. However, it has recently been argued that informal entrepreneurship may actually offer greater autonomy and flexibility than paid work, and may benefit women with competing work and home demands. As well, limited costs and time invested may be particularly appealing to refugees as many arrive with little financial capital (Rodgers and Williams, 2019).

Notwithstanding motives for starting a business, we know relatively little about refugee entrepreneurship in general. Specifically, refugee populations are oftentimes considered as part

of the broader migrant population and not discussed separately. If a distinction is made, it is usually based on ethnic background, hence the extensive research on ‘ethnic entrepreneurship’ (Dana and Morris, 2011; Koning and Verver, 2013; Ramadani et al., 2014). Some notable exceptions do exist. For instance, in their study on refugee entrepreneurs in Belgium, Wauters and Lambrecht (2008) found that refugees often sought out entrepreneurial endeavours in sectors where opportunity is available (e.g. convenience stores) but faced numerous barriers along the way (e.g. no access to bank loans, lack of social networks). Authors also noted that these businesses had minimal appeal to the Belgium people so they were dependent on foreigners. Bizri’s (2017) case study of a Syrian refugee entrepreneur offered a potential explanation for how social capital supports entrepreneurship. Particularly, she found her participant displayed a ‘one-way-ahead’ attitude (i.e. no looking back or hope of returning home) which helped bring together other co-ethnic members and close family to invest in the success of the business.

In conducting a separate analysis on refugee entrepreneurship, these studies were able to delineate main differences with other immigrants. Specifically, the rushed nature of their departure often means that refugees cannot set things up in advance, leave behind financial capital and social networks, and may be ill prepared for formal employment. This gives rise to greater barriers, risks, but can also promote resilience as refugees try to navigate their new normal and venture into entrepreneurship. These effects transcend to refugee women more acutely, but this is seldom explored (Billore, 2011).

A gendered perspective is needed on refugee entrepreneurship, as refugee women’s context differ from their male counterparts. Three main differences are discussed below, each which have implications for refugee women’s motivations to engage in entrepreneurship:

- Women tend to operate at the periphery in society, marginalized and often excluded from social and economic dimensions including formal employment.
- Women are burdened with maternal responsibilities either by patriarchal societies and/or cultural norms.
- Women fled their country of origin with only part of their family (e.g. many leave behind husbands and adult children) and, as a consequence, may need to adapt and take on new gender roles in the host country.

Syrian Refugees in Canada

Canada is a recognized global leader in humanitarian aid, and provides settlement and integration for newcomers, including refugees. Through varied Settlement Programs (for a description, see Senthana et al., in press), refugees receive vital information about Canada and the community in which they intend to settle, language training, employment assistance, and connections to available programs and services.

At the height of the Syrian civil war, the Canadian government committed to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees by early 2016. As of August 2018, this number had been exceeded and 58,600 Syrians had been resettled, predominately in larger metropolitan areas (IRCC, 2018). This large-scale effort followed the decade long conflict in Syria that began with mass protests calling for the overhaul of President Bashar al-Assad's government including calls for civil rights reform and for a democratic regime. The Syrian government responded with armed force, leading to the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Syrians who fled to neighbouring countries. In many ways, the Syrian refugee crisis was the largest influx in Canada following the arrival of the Southeast Asian 'Boat people' in 1980.

The refugee selection process for entry to Canada favoured vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as young families and the elderly (Agrawal, 2018). Refugees were provided with income support for one year to help cover the cost of food, incidentals, shelter and transportation. After the year, refugees were expected to be able to support themselves, which typically meant that they had to find and secure employment. Preliminary census data collected one year after their arrival reveals that, among Syrians aged 20 to 59, 24% of males and only 8% of females were employed. This is twice as low as for refugees from other countries (Houle, 2019). A survey conducted in Toronto, home to one of the largest Syrian cohorts, found that only 33% of respondents were working (14% fulltime, 19% part-time) two years after arrival, mostly in construction or food services sector (COSTI, 2018). Low employment participation rates could partially be explained by language and educational level as only one-third of Syrians knew one of Canada's official languages and roughly one-half arrived with no credentials (Houle, 2019). Finally, the gendered division of labour suggests that cultural expectations may be at play. Particularly, men presumably enter the workforce at a quicker rate to maintain their role as the breadwinner while women engage in a 'second shift' (Gowayed, 2019), slowly transitioning into paid employment as it requires coordination with care work.

5.2 Methodology

Theoretical Positioning

This study employs a feminist grounded theory approach (Wuest, 1995). This approach focuses on respecting subjective interpretations of social experience, acknowledging the contextual and relational nature of knowledge, promoting reflexivity, and valuing the relationship between the researcher and the participant in the research process (Plummer and Young, 2010). Here, women

are the knowledge knowers and theory is grounded and emerges from their accounts. There is a recognition of multiple perspectives and contexts that move toward social justice (Olesen, 2007).

A feminist grounded approach does not depict women as powerless or without agency. Rather, it reveals the micro- and macro-level influences and carefully explicates differences between them, while avoiding perpetuating discourse on oppression, also known as ‘victim blaming’ (Olesen, 2007). Thus, rather than simply describing what is occurring, a conceptual picture of why and how something is the way it is becomes apparent. Using a feminist grounded approach, then, we seek to explore how the women’s contextual characteristics contributed to their entrepreneurial path. This can help inform our understanding of entrepreneurial choice or lack thereof among refugees and particularly the unique challenges encountered by women.

Data collection

Between March and September 2018, twenty-nine (29) in-depth interviews were conducted with Syrian refugee women (20) and key informants (9). The former were recruited from 12 settlement organizations in the Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo Region via information letters submitted to the organizations. The organizations, whom provide immediate and long-term assistance to newcomers, were instrumental in advertising the study to potential participants. To participate in this study, the women had to have lived in Canada for a minimum of one year, be over the age of 18, speak either English or Arabic, and have arrived as a refugee through any of the Canadian refugee streams.

Key informants were individuals that work closely with newcomer populations to facilitate integration. They were often employed at settlement organizations and included employment counselors, program managers, and program administrators. Key informants were either recruited at the onset when the lead author sought their help to distribute the information

letter to refugee women or through social media, pre-existing social and/or institutional ties, cold calling/emailing, and snowball sampling.

Among the women, about three-quarters had either started a small, informal business or were in the process of developing a business plan. The businesses were primarily in the catering or tailoring sectors, and included a number of women who had either not worked or held different employment positions in Syria. A detailed description of the sample is provided in Table 5.1.

All interviews were conducted at a place and time of the participant's choosing. Interviews lasted anywhere between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours and focused on challenges with entering the formal labour force, woman's decisions to start a business, as well as probes into how and whether start-ups disrupted the women's family role. Eight interviews were conducted in Arabic with the lead author alongside an informal interpreter, who translated the dialogue to English.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist, and entered into NVivo, a qualitative software program that allows for coding and analyzing of interview data. Following each interview, detailed field notes were written to capture initial impression and note possible themes for future analysis.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed a modified grounded theory approach (Charmez, 2006) which involved systemic coding, constant comparison, and deviant case analysis to conceptualize the women's entrepreneurial endeavours since arriving in Canada.

First, following an in-depth read through of a handful of interviews, an initial coding framework was developed by two of the authors (SS and EM). This coding framework

comprised deductive codes, codes defined a priori through relevant literature, and inductive codes, codes that emerged from the data. Some examples of inductive codes included “dream” where the women reflected on their long-term employment goals and aspirations in their new home. An example of a deductive code included “feminized industry” where the women described being referred to, or pursuing a position, in a sector dominated by women, which is a common reality for many immigrant women and thus, a priori. Data collected from key informants was used to fill in details about how the integration system operates more broadly to influence refugees’ employment prospects. An example of a related code was “support”, where key informants described support systems in place (e.g. sponsorship groups) to assist newcomers. This coding framework was then applied to each interview and as new interviews arose, underwent constant addition and improvement to account for new data and/or to expand codes.

Once all interviews were coded, code summaries (a written summary of each code that identified analytic issues and key features from each interview) were created to distill findings and facilitate in-depth analysis of key themes within and across the data. This process enabled us to examine how the experiences of refugee women varied under different circumstances.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In the case of Arabic-speaking women, the consent form was translated and described in detail with the help of the interpreter. No personal identifiers were used in this study and each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

5.3 Findings

Almost all of the women interviewed pursued entrepreneurship out of necessity – as a means to supplement their household income – although their circumstances differed, as described through the three main themes. For some, entrepreneurship offered a way to balance their work and home responsibilities, allowing them to set their schedules around the needs of their family. Other women entered entrepreneurship when labour market barriers (e.g. lack of language proficiency) prevented them from securing work in the formal economy. As well, key informants such as employment counselors and program managers seemed to promote entrepreneurship in the form of a social enterprise, where newcomer women can gather in a shared space to practice soft skills while participating in the informal and feminized, employment sector. Many of the challenges to entrepreneurship, irrespective of the women's circumstances, are addressed throughout the findings.

Syrian refugee women pursued entrepreneurship to balance their responsibilities in and outside the home

Roughly one-quarter of the women described flexibility of working hours and cash-in-hand payment as important advantages of entrepreneurship. These women described how being their own boss and setting their own schedules helped them to manage their household responsibilities, which included taking care of children, preparing meals, and other household chores. Tasia, a homemaker with minimal previous work experience, is a prime example of the women's willingness to go beyond their comfort zone to make a living in a new country. At the advice of her sponsorship group, she started to sell Syrian food to her small network of family, friends, and neighbours. She described this as providing her with an opportunity to make some money, network with others in the community, and importantly, to care for her 3 young children.

...the children [go to] school for long hours. They come back at 3 o'clock. I have long time to cook and receive orders and manage my [time]...I dream I can be self-employee because, if I was hired outside, they require that a certain hours to work, and because of my children, I cannot work ... so, at home I can make my work the way I can. So I don't have make a commitment certain hours with another employer [interpreter translated].

Tasia's lack of engagement in the formal economy largely stems from her discomfort with working around men. While a few other women shared similar feelings, likely due to cultural norms in Syria, Tasia was open to adapting if it meant improving her language skills:

So the Syrian women I think they don't like to be in the same workplace with men so if there's anyway if we can separate ... but if there were men I would say it has to be with Canadian, not with Syrian, because [we] learn more, [we] learn language... it's an opportunity to make a friendship with another like man or like people from different culture [interpreter translated].

Similarly, Maarit a mother of 6 children all under the age of 13, was able to start a home childcare business. The business was not a licensed daycare facility; she considered it to be more of a 'babysitting' venture which provided her with both income and a sense of purpose:

...when I first came, I noticed that I have to work. I don't feel good when I stay home just doing the housework... naturally I love dealing with the children and very patient. So my friend used me for babysitting, and I'm already doing this... so, I thought babysitting could be like a good job for me, and home childcare provider [interpreter translated].

The balance of being able to work from home and care for her family was further realized when her husband increased his contribution to the household. This was surprising given that many of the women in this study emphasized the presence of traditional gender roles in their marriage where the men were the breadwinners and the women were accustomed to managing household responsibilities. With Maarit's new found entrepreneurial spirit, however, she saw a "change in my husband, he would help me with cleaning, preparing the food and this never happened in Syria".

In some instances, stay-at-home mothers described how they sought out opportunities to provide products or services that were needed in their community. Rana, for instance, settled in an area which only received a small number of the Syrian refugees. She noticed that the Arabic

traditional cuisine was largely missing in her community and so decided to start a small catering business, using word of mouth to test the viability and see how people responded to her food.

While she recognized that the income was good and she was able to be at home with her toddlers, she felt that the barriers such as licensing (i.e. need to cook from a licensed commercial kitchen) and required certifications to handle food prevented her from fully establishing as a catering business:

I was trying to have my own business but first of all, it costs a lot of money. Then you have to make the certificate, it's very hard to get it... it's almost impossible to do this especially for some people they're new at this country, you know.

Similar to Rana, Febe also saw the need for inclusion of Syrian foods in her community and jumped at the opportunity to start a catering business. In Syria, she had owned her own at-home tailoring business so it seemed natural for her to want to start a business in Canada as well.

Especially while her children were at school, she felt she would have ample time to cook and prepare foods. However, she was ultimately disappointed when she could not meet the requirements to set up a food stand due to financial and other barriers.

...I went to Farmer's Market and met with management... they asked how can I bring a small station there and I can sell my food so there was like almost 20 thing requirement and none of those we have, we can't do it... [they wanted] Canadian experience, English level, at least level 5, license for selling food, a full year rent has to be paid ahead of time. Even we try to negotiate to make it six months, but they [said no], as a beginner, it's hard to afford it [interpreter translated].

She went on to contrast the Canadian and Syrian regulatory landscape, noting that the latter had no specific conditions to starting a business but here, there were “too many regulations”.

Economic success of these businesses further tended to rely on ethnic networks for practical help, socializing, and sharing information about the business through word of mouth. Many of the women stated how the demand for their product was limited, presumably because the food catering occupational niche was heavily concentrated. The women knew they needed to

develop bridging social networks and ties with people outside their immediate circle (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006) but they simply did not know how to do this. As one participant stated “we would like people to hear about us, we can make a page on Instagram... but I don’t know who to invite...”.

Syrian refugee women are unable to find work in the formal economy and so turn to entrepreneurship

Although some women entered entrepreneurship to balance home demands, others started a business largely because of their inability to find work. These women sought out potential jobs through community and ethnic connections (e.g. friends, family, connections from other ethnic members), handing out resumes directly, or going through settlement agencies which connected them with employers. The jobs available were typically low prestige, low-waged positions and, specific categories of women, namely those arriving through the government-assisted program, were often excluded from these positions due to their lack of language proficiency, credentials, and work experience. More detail on the employment outcomes of women arriving through Canada’s differential resettlement streams is published elsewhere (Senthanar et al., in press).

With income supports coming to an end, given that governmental and private support is typically provided up to one year, and mounting financial pressures, the women felt they had to think of ways to earn some money, even if entrepreneurship was not their ideal career path. For example, some women talked about wanting to continue their education in Canada in order to gain long-term employment prospects that were safe and secure, but then realising that barriers were too far reaching.

...I would love to go again to school for nursing, but I know that’s [not easy] and I know that require good English. I’m working on this. I wish the government can support small business for example, like start a small kitchen for [me and] my sister [Bahar, government-assisted refugee, interpreter translated].

In addition to her language difficulties, Bahar also felt there was a lack of resources present to help her and her sister navigate starting a new business. As she describes below, financial capital is needed to start a business; however, loans do not make sense for newcomers who have no prior assets nor can guarantee the success of the business to be able to repay:

...we were told to start this business, we need some money. We need loan too...It's not only the loan. Even if we get a loan, even if we get everything, we don't know how to promote our business. We don't know to whom we should sell and how our products we can like sell our product. We don't know the system [interpreter translated].

Similarly, Dhalia was keen to continue her education but found that there were a number of obstacles she had to overcome (ie. language, childcare) before that would be possible. She decided she would need to put education on the backburner and instead find ways to mediate her labour market shortcomings. Her business idea developed when she began volunteering and taking a cashier training course with other Syrian women. This was to start a combined project offering sewing and catering services, which she described as offering “two-way benefits... we make money and serve the community we live in”. Aside from practical barriers such as money and commercial space, she found she was also being teased by the other women, who related to a woman's role in the house, not as an entrepreneur.

So nobody accepts our application to work with them because of the language barrier. That's why I thought if we have the space...we can run a project.... So many Syrian women like make fun of me because this is a big thing I'm asking for, but I'm ready to like face all that challenging. I am ready to like challenge all the barriers ... I don't care about whatever... the negative comments, they making [interpreter translated].

A small number of women held professional occupations pre-migration, such as teaching. However, upon arriving to Canada they experienced a loss of occupational status. For some this was because they arrived with only part of their family (e.g. leaving behind parents or in-laws) and so lost the childcare help they needed to be able to work. For others, limited finances restricted their opportunities. For example, when asked why they hadn't looked into

upgrading their teaching credentials in order to teach in Canada, some women reported that they preferred to allow their husbands to upgrade and attend available programming while they focused on the children. Shera's husband, for instance, has two degrees from the United States so she felt his income prospects would be better than hers. With a lack of transportation and childcare, she resorted to starting a small-scale home-based food catering business, but was uncertain about its viability:

...my problem is that I have my kids at home ... and I don't drive so this was my first problem... [So] my friends start to encourage me start this food catering... [But] you know like here's so many cultures so if the people will accept this kind of food. Like maybe the Syrian people will buy this food, but other people, I'm not sure like they will accept it or not. So, I'm waiting for a—maybe chance to join some events, those bazar events and see like if people will like this food or not.

Hannie, on the other hand, arrived with some financial capital, having migrated directly from a developed country rather than spending time in bordering developing countries like Lebanon or Turkey, as most of the women had. She described, however, that upgrading her teaching degree would take two or more years and would take money that could be used toward her four children. Similar to Shera, she seemed to sacrifice her profession and instead was working on an entrepreneurial business, a creative spin to teaching which focused on reintroducing culture and language to Arabic kids.

I noticed here that teaching Arabic is not so interesting for the children. In my back home, I used to work in kindergarten and in pre-school. They have much more fun, not like here. My project is to use the same ideas, new strategies in this project... I'm sure that will do something for the children. It will help for teaching the Arabic language. I really want the children, I notice that the children here are having difficulties in learning their native language of course. I like to be to help in teaching them their native language in a good way, in an interesting way of course.

Entrepreneurship framed as a 'social enterprise'

Regardless of reasons or circumstances that led to entrepreneurship, many of the women reported having a sense of identity to the Canadian community and feeling somewhat fulfilled in knowing

that they were contributing to it. However, the women also described being frustrated as starting a business involved a number of demands and barriers that were not easily manageable. These barriers described above – funding, licenses, certification, commercial space – stalled many of the women’s plans. As one participant put it: ‘[I wish] somebody knows my skills and partner with me or government give money and I can start my business’.

While the women voiced both pros and cons of entrepreneurship, employment counselors and program managers in our study framed entrepreneurship positively as a social enterprise. Social enterprises are businesses that have both social and business goals. They integrate an earned income framework with a social purpose, which for newcomers, equates to help during the settlement and integration process (Canadian CED Network, 2010). All of our key informants were from non-profit organizations, some of which were ethno-cultural organizations, providing services for the community including employment, housing, and healthcare. These organizations ran ‘social enterprise’ programs as a way of training newcomers, with the goal of having them become independent businesses when they are ready.

Many of the program managers involved with these organizations felt that offering social enterprise programs in largely feminized sectors such as cooking, tailoring, or family and child rearing not only promoted social cohesion with other members in the community in a safe and comfortable manner but also taught the women soft (e.g. teamwork) and hard skills (e.g. language) needed to run a business. These programs were also meant to work around the needs of the women’s family role, as described by Lisa:

...helping them set up a single social enterprise that they can all, you know, benefit from and participate in that meets their specific need, which basically is, you know, part-time employment while their kids are at school, that it’s flexible enough that if one of their kids are sick, you know, they’re not going to lose their job, if they need to stay home or like can allow, you know, like them to perhaps, make money on commission or you know, where they work when they can...

Program managers explained that programming was developed around feminized occupations because many of the women were coming to them with limited work history and so, they were having to flesh out their skills developed from outside of typical paid employment positions. Participating employment counselors described how women typically held traditional roles in their families, which seeped into their new lives in Canada even as they tried to find work. Transitioning from minimal work experience to now wanting to start a business needed a paradigm shift that first required boosting self-esteem through social enterprises.

...how to really raise the women's self-esteem, their ability to speak because, one of the things I will say, when they have the opportunity, they thrive more than the men. A lot of them realize that they only have things to gain in Canada, right? There's a lot more supports here for women, there's a lot more sort of human rights kind of stuff... and the men, they may have had a high level position in another country, but they're never going to regain here. So, they feel that they've been brought down, but the women see the potential. But it takes a while for them to maybe get to that point, and I don't think many of the Syrian women are there yet, but I've seen it in other groups. So, once they get that English, they're willing to work really hard and look for ways to move up. Because for them it's about gaining... (Marie, employment counselor).

The success of these programs was noted by many of the key informants in these organizations, who reported that the newcomer women participating developed confidence in their abilities and resilience to employment-related challenges as they were able to practice skills such as language (with clients and other women), customer service, and basic monetary transactions.

In some instances, these social enterprise programs served entirely as a bridge between product, whether Syrian food or tailoring services, and clientele. Unlike above, where social enterprise was geared toward entrepreneurship (i.e. to help women learn the skills to start their own business), these programs are a category of social enterprises called 'training businesses'. Newcomers are trainees in the program, learning job-specific skills, earning a wage, and in the end, are supported by the organizations to find related employment elsewhere. One Senior Manager, for example, described how this form of social enterprise managed by an organization

can give customers access to a pool of products and services while the women are not burdened by having to run the business.

An organization that could provide ... or a social service agency like us are saying, oh, I need child minders or I need catering or I need someone to come in and, you know, facilitate a meeting or I need someone to do x, y or z, even cleaning whatever. They could flow to this and—and the quality sort of assurance, the quality control and that, you know, the deliverables will be guaranteed, sort of like a social enterprise, where—where people are entrepreneurs, and then they would like have their work organized...

This can be especially helpful when the women's intersecting barriers and responsibilities, many of which were previously discussed, interfere with their employment and entrepreneurial aspirations.

Finally, cultural expectations, reported by some key informants, wherein '[women's] priority will be family [while] the husband has to do a job', were not disrupted by social enterprises given the flexible scheduling and ability for the women to drop in and out of the programs as they deemed necessary.

5.4 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

While previous research has homogenized the entrepreneurial literature as encompassing migrants, this study makes a distinction at two levels – refugees and women – to investigate refugee women's experiences of setting up and running a business in Canada. Refugee entrepreneurs are often necessity driven. However, findings from this study suggest that necessity was underpinned by a combination of factors to explain the women's entrepreneurial motives. These factors included flexibility, labour market barriers that prevented access to the formal economy, and the role of social enterprise programs.

For many of the women, entrepreneurship presented an opportunity to earn money and to balance family and work life, which fit with the cultural norms at play. Particularly, in Syria, many of the women's husbands were the family breadwinner and the women's role was

predominately that of a wife and mother. In trying to adhere to these preconceived gender roles, the women seemed to be concerned with maintaining their family dynamic upon arrival while contributing economically to the household income in any way they could. This balancing act can be especially challenging, as seen in studies of other Arab societies (Essers and Benschop, 2009; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010); however, the women in the present study were very resilient. In particular, they were willing to adapt to working around men or venture outside of the realm of what they knew, if it meant improving their chances of earning an income.

The loss of occupational status for some women was expected and is endemic to refugees (Lamba, 2003). Structural constraints (e.g. recognition of credentials and Canadian work experience) and childcare responsibilities pushed these women to sacrifice their careers for that of their husbands and to pursue entrepreneurship instead. This endeavour was meant to be temporary until their families were settled. As more time passes, however, the likelihood of acquiring a job at the pre-migration skill level decreases (Constable et al., 2004). Thus, entrepreneurship becomes a new reality for the refugee women.

As the women began to embrace their new reality, access to entrepreneurship included a new set of hurdles, the biggest being money. Start-up capital is a commonly cited barrier to entrepreneurship and it is known to hinder refugees more than other immigrants (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008; Refai et al., 2018), presumably because refugees' departures are relatively unplanned and they arrive with minimal if any assets. In the context of a lack in familiarity with administrative and regulatory requirements and limited social and professional networks, refugees sought income via the informal economy. Bernabè (2002) suggests that informal entrepreneurial activities are a common example of survival work. The women did not seem to disagree with this although they also did not exclusively describe it as survival work. Many

reported being frustrated with the exhaustive barriers and regulatory landscape that differed substantially than what they were used to in Syria.

With these barriers in mind, it is clear that refugee women can benefit from programmes to assist with entrepreneurship, as is seen in many EU countries (Hooper, Desiderio, and Salant, 2017). For instance, cities such as Vienna and Barcelona offer free training sessions through city-administered agencies to help refugees design a business plan or secure funding, and some agencies target particular groups, including women (Hooper, Desiderio, and Salant, 2017). Private sector actors and employers have also stepped up to meet refugee needs. Finland's StartUp Refugee's program, for instance, profiles a refugee's skills and experience and then matches them to their network of over 500 members, including companies, universities, entrepreneurs, and other professionals. As of October 2018, StartUp had organized 94 business workshops and supported nearly 60 entrepreneurial endeavours. Similarly, with the large Syrian influx, Germany's Chamber of Trade and Industry started to offer monthly courses to set out the legal requirements to start a business and connect refugees with local businesses (Desiderio, 2016). To extend reach, the program is offered in Arabic, thus eliminating the language barrier.

Our findings show that, unlike the EU, current programming in Canada tends to frame entrepreneurship as a 'social enterprise'. Social enterprise programs circumvent barriers relating to finance (by providing the space and materials needed) while providing the women with an opportunity to practice language and develop soft skills. However, these programs focused on sectors which were either not difficult to enter or where other refugees may have been successful (commonly referred to as 'market opportunities') (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). These sectors were also largely feminized and tended to reinforce the notion that women operate domestically. This is troubling given that a third of the participants had college education or higher yet were

still steered towards the same low-skill, feminised programs and services. Thus, policymakers could consider broadening these social enterprise programs to include sectors that are less dominated by women and may benefit from women's inclusion. This is supported by previous research which shows that women-led businesses in such sectors (e.g. tech, manufacturing) are high performing (Evans, 2017). Supporting these businesses may provide employment opportunities for refugees who would otherwise be unemployed (Van der Leun and Rusinovic, 2001).

Moreover, many of the women recounted how their sales were limited to close friends and family within the same ethnic circles, as previously seen (Public Interest, 2013), presumably out of the comfort of shared values and products. The women had a desire to expand their products and services but “did not know the system” and in turn how to promote their business to the general public. Insufficient language hindered their already precarious situations so, in this regard, social enterprises may seem beneficial as the women are able to sell to customers outside their ethnic community. Alternatively, building cultural capital in one's new home country (e.g. improved English language and general ‘how to’) can enable refugee entrepreneurs to become embedded in their sector and seen as legitimate business operators by the wider population (Rodgers and Williams, 2019). To do so, social enterprise programs can expand and bridge with small start-ups, employers, and the like to offer induction programs that provide education to refugees on the mechanisms that must be in place to support businesses and increase overall knowledgeableability on issues like marketing and promotion. While previously discussed programming and policy shares similar facets, a bridged program can help reduce costs incurred by governments and benefit newcomers in the form of hands-on training.

This study is not without limitations. The study reach is localized geographically within metropolitan cities in Southern Ontario and involved a relatively small number of entrepreneurs. Further research could expand the study to examine rural and remote areas where entrepreneurship may be more challenging. Whilst the views of the women cannot be considered to be representative of all refugee entrepreneurs arriving in Canada, limiting transferability, the study provides rich contextual contributions to the migrant entrepreneur literature that is largely missing. As well, the wide array of recruitment avenues and inclusion criteria ensured a heterogenous group with varying backgrounds and experiences, which is characteristic of Canada's diverse population.

This study revealed important dimensions to the migrant entrepreneurship literature by focusing on refugee women. The Syrian women in this study pursued entrepreneurship in the informal economy out of necessity and particular circumstances. Policy and programming that is geared toward understanding these circumstances can take the necessary measures to build on those characteristics and may help increase the chances of a business' success and survival. Given the large influx of refugees to date and their affinity to own a business, it would greatly benefit the Canadian economy to consider ways to safely and securely integrate refugee entrepreneurs.

Table 5.1 Characteristics of Syrian refugee women entrepreneurs

Pseudonym	Pre-migration occupation	Sector	Already in business
Shera	Teacher	Syrian food catering	No
Amine	Housewife	Syrian deserts	Yes
Maya	Housewife	Syrian deserts	Yes
Rana	Teacher	Syrian food catering	No
Bahar	Housewife	Syrian food catering	No
Dhalia	Housewife	Syrian food catering and tailoring	No
Hannie	Teacher	Education	No
Galina	Teacher	Artisanal crafts	No
Maarit	Housewife	Childcare	Yes
Tasia	Housewife	Syrian food catering	Yes
Febe	Tailor/seamstress	Syrian food catering	No

Chapter 6

General Discussion

6.1 Overview

Employment integration of refugees in Canada is an important concern given that Canada is one of the top refugee receiving countries in the developed world and trends suggest immigration rates will double in as quick as the next three years (Harris, Hall, Zimonjic, 2017; UNHCR, 2017). Nearly one-half of admitted refugees are women (Hudon, 2015), many of whom face acute labour market barriers due to lack of language proficiency, non-recognition of foreign credentials, and lack of Canadian work experience.

While employment integration through policy and programming is available, these approaches are generally siloed. Federally-funded language classes, for instance, are provided to refugees for free upon arrival yet uptake of these classes is usually by individuals who have the time, freedom, and resources (e.g. access to transportation) to attend. Circumstances outside of refugee's immediate housing and occupational needs and concerns (e.g. domestic responsibilities) are seldom considered. This dissertation sought to fill this gap and provide a comprehensive portrait of refugee employment integration.

Using a qualitative research design informed by feminist grounded theory, this dissertation explored the employment integration situations of Syrian refugee women. The main objectives were to: (i) describe refugee women's employment integration experience; (ii) identify challenges in securing employment and how the women navigate through them; (iii) explore the influence of policy and programming in shaping women's employment experience; (iv) explore and understand how gender roles interact with employment; and, (v) identify potential avenues and strategies to promote a safe and secure employment experience for refugees. In the following sections, key knowledge gained from this research will be discussed

and situated within a framework for understanding employment integration. This is followed by a discussion of policy and practice implications, research contributions, strengths and limitations, and directions for future research.

6.2 Summary of key findings

Chapter 3 examined the role of settlement agencies and programs provided in shaping the women's employment experience, and how services rendered varied by immigrant status. The women described being provided with low quality employment services and being shuffled between settlement agencies with differing priorities, such as assisting with immediate needs (e.g. access to health care) and help applying for social assistance. This chapter also details how settlement agencies had pre-existing ties with employers in the community seeking cheap labour, which led to women being directed to employment in jobs that were below their skill level or were inaccessible as many of the women did not have access to transportation and had childcare responsibilities. Overall, women felt a mismatch between positions offered and jobs they were capable of doing.

This chapter also considered differences between programming offered by settlement agencies to refugees and to other immigrant categories. In particular, settlement agency staff in this study described favourable treatment for other immigrants who arrived "labour market ready", with many possessing the skills and experience that employers were seeking. Consequently, other immigrants had better access to skilled, secure opportunities through settlement programs, while refugee opportunities were limited to low-waged, low-skilled positions that were often in feminized sectors such as food services and tailoring. This study identified a discourse centered around refugees' shortcomings and showed how settlement agencies contributed to female refugees' underemployment.

Chapter 4 examined the differences between employment experiences and outcomes of women entering through Canada's four main refugee settlement programs. While three of the programs (Government-assisted, Private Sponsorship, Blended Visa Office-referred) provide financial support to refugees and their families for up to one year, refugees arriving as Refugee Claimants are expected to be immediately financially self-sufficient. Government-assisted refugee women experienced particular mental health issues and often lacked language skills, education, or paid work experience, all which prevented them from securing employment when compared to women who entered Canada through other refugee categories. This can partially be explained by the refugee eligibility criteria set by IRCC (Hyndman, Payne, and Jimenez, 2017), which selects government-assisted refugees based on vulnerability. In contrast, privately sponsored, blended visa and refugee claimants had social support networks (family, friends, and sponsorship groups) and these networks helped the women to navigate barriers and provided opportunities for employment.

Gendered roles shaped women's ability to engage in the labour force across all resettlement streams. While some women, namely privately sponsored and refugee claimants, were better able to navigate *double days* (domestic duties coupled with paid work), it was harder for government-assisted women to take up an identity as income earners when, in their family, that role had traditionally been occupied by men. The study findings, consistent with those of Chapter 3, pointed to the importance of settlement programming. Settlement agency staff described how government-assisted women's greater barriers to employment (limited education, childcare responsibilities) required targeted assistance and programs and that it was somewhat easier to match the other types of refugees with jobs. This study identified the particular disadvantage of government-assisted refugee women when compared to women arriving through

other streams and pointed to social support networks as important mediators to accessing the labour market.

Finally, Chapter 5 extended the studies described in Chapters 3 and 4 to examine a commonly recurring employment outcome: entrepreneurship. The women described how financial need and personal circumstances suggested entrepreneurship in the informal economy as a viable career path. These circumstances that prevented access to the formal economy included balancing their work and childcare responsibilities as well as lack of language proficiency, financial capital and resources, and the need to upgrade their credentials.

These findings contrast with previous migrant entrepreneurship literature that focused on entrepreneurship as a survival strategy and the only real form of employment attainable by refugees (Sadiku-Dushi, 2019). This study provided positive reasons to pursue entrepreneurship such as cultural fit. For instance, some of the women who shared traditional Syrian cultural norms were leaning toward entrepreneurship to circumvent their discomfort with working around men. Accordingly, program managers in the study tended to offer social enterprise entrepreneurial programs in feminized sectors under the premise that such programs work around the traditional needs of women while allowing them to improve their language skills and learn basics of starting and running a business (e.g. interacting with clients). However, evaluations on these programs are not available and therefore it is not known if entrepreneurship is achieved. Like in Chapters 3 and 4, policy implications drawing on research findings and successful initiatives in other jurisdictions are provided to promote positive employment and entrepreneurial uptake.

As a whole, this dissertation enhances our understanding of employment experiences of refugee women in Canada, a subgroup that is seldom recognized and instead grouped monolithically with other immigrant categories. The findings were used to develop a conceptual framework, described below, that summarizes employment integration and outlines pathways to women's employment outcomes.

6.3 Towards an understanding of employment integration

Refugee employment integration is a dynamic and complex process and refugee women face unique challenges (Makwarimba et al., 2013). While other immigrant categories are systematically impacted by many labour market barriers (e.g. discrimination, credential recognition), refugee women in this study were additionally confronted by a variety of conditions leading to employment in low-waged, low-skilled precarious positions in informal and feminized sectors.

Current theories on refugee integration look at multiple dimensions. One of the most comprehensive integration models comes from Ager and Strang's (2008) model on 'successful integration'. The model has four levels in the shape of an inverted triangle: the bottom level addresses citizenship as a foundation for integration, the second level are facilitators (e.g. language) needed to navigate a community, the third level is social relationships (with the community, members), and the last level are objective variables (housing, education, employment, health) which are considered basic precursors to achieving equity. This model is described briefly here because it exemplifies the bidirectional relationships between the levels. For instance, social inclusion can facilitate language learning which is important to employment (Hynie, Korn, and Tao, 2016). Extending from Ager and Strang, Hynie and colleagues (2014) considered the social context of refugees where the social environment (agencies, institutions,

communities) affects not only functional aspects of integration but their sense of belonging as well.

In both of these models, employment is considered an objective functional outcome influenced by a variety of conditions. Informed by these models, we propose a new framework for employment integration that delineates the multiple and complex ways that employment is impacted. This framework incorporates missing elements while acknowledging the importance of conditions previously identified by scholars. The resulting Employment Integration Framework is presented in Figure 6.1. The Employment Integration Framework has six key levels of influence: labour market barriers, economic context, gender, social support networks, settlement agency, and settlement stream. The latter two collectively encompass settlement policy and practice.

In the proceeding sections, we will unpack the common employment pathways experienced by the refugee women. As we move through these pathways, we can see how varying conditions of the framework interact leading to the women's employment outcomes.

Government-assisted refugees and vulnerability:

A predominant barrier that constrains integration is language proficiency (Ager and Strang, 2008). Language is depicted as a 'two-way' understanding which benefits refugees' integration but also is needed for receiving communities to effectively facilitate integration. While our findings affirm lack of language proficiency as a common labour market barrier, the women also frequently described language as a challenge that mediated the effects of other barriers such as gaining Canadian work experience or credential recognition.

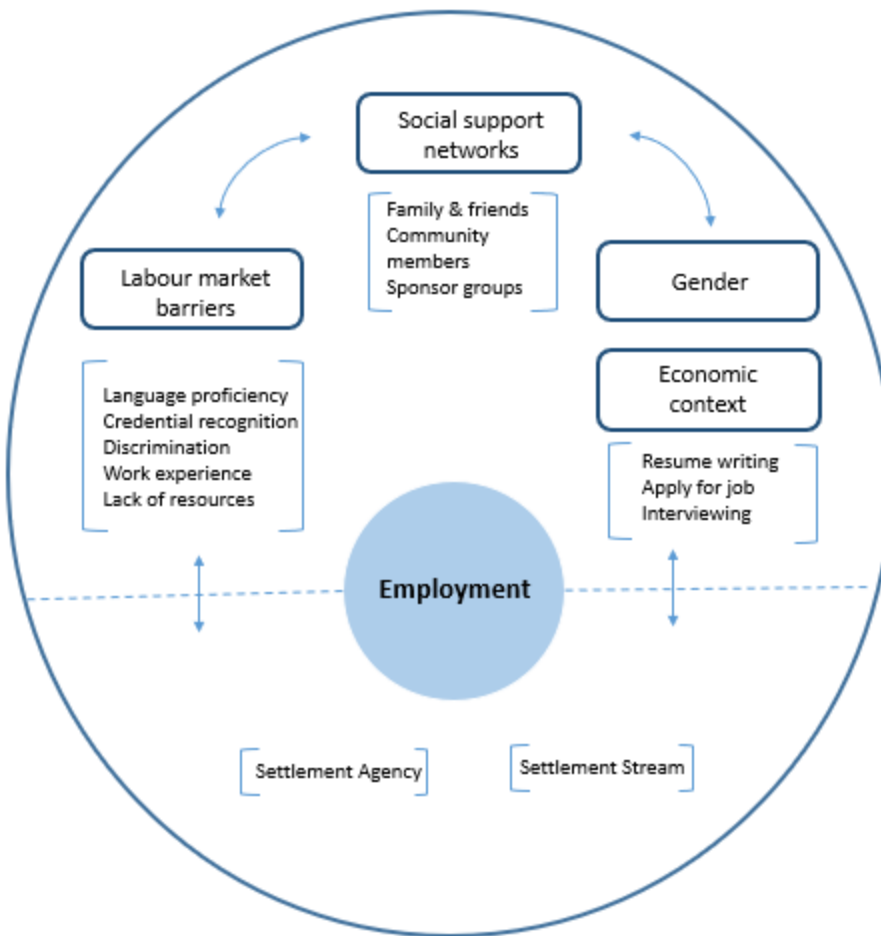


Figure 6.1 The Employment Integration Framework

This was especially the case for government-assisted refugee women in comparison to women arriving through other resettlement streams. Particularly, government-assisted refugees are selected based on vulnerability rather than vocational or professional skills. Thus, these women often arrived with limited exposure to English (Hudon, 2015) and they may risk social isolation (Killian and Lehr, 2015) as they arrive with minimal social connections. Consequently, when refugee women try to develop social networks, improve language, and seek language instruction programs, they may experience access issues when gender roles (e.g. childcare

responsibilities) prevent them from attending (Garang, 2012). This has been referred to as trifold disadvantage when gender, gender role, and immigrant status converge, especially when women prioritize family over personal success (Lalande, Crozier, & Davey, 2000; Branden, 2014). This disadvantage is further complicated by the fact that advancement to higher language levels is slow in language programs (CIC, 2010) leading some women to question the practical purpose of trying to attend. In fact, several of the women in this study were dissatisfied with language classes which made their decision to stay home easier.

Social support and inclusion:

In contrast to government-assisted women, women arriving through the privately sponsored stream had more successful employment integration experiences due, in part, to the quality of relationships with their sponsorship groups and supports. Social connections between refugees and members of the community serve as a ‘connective tissue’ (Ager and Strang, 2008) to public outcomes that include employment. Many of the women interviewed valued their relationships in the community and expressed a sense of inclusion and welcoming (Smith, 2008). Privately sponsored and blended-visa women additionally had some prior knowledge of the Canadian labour market through these personal and sponsorship networks and many arrived with the skills Canadian employers were seeking which included language proficiency, education, and work experience. These findings align with research that describes social networks as key sources of information and advice on employment (Beaman, 2011; Williams, 2006; Lamba, 2008; Hanley et al., 2018). In their study on privately sponsored Syrian refugees in Montreal, for instance, Hanley et al. (2018) found that respondents were actively engaged in their social networks which consisted mainly of friends within the same ethnic community, family and

relatives, and sponsoring organizations. Over one-quarter (35%) of their sample leveraged these ties to secure employment, although the quality of employment was not discussed. In our study, these connections and ties did result in jobs, albeit precarious and deskilled, or job offers which the women actively contemplated whether to accept or not based on their options. In the end, many of these women decided to turn down job offers as it did not relate to their previous skills and education and instead were in the process of looking into upgrading programs and other training opportunities.

Settlement agencies and barriers to employment access:

Settlement agencies often referred the women to employment-related programs offered through their organization or in the community. However, as the women tried to enroll in these programs, many found eligibility requirements and issues arising from a lack of transportation limited their access to programs providing skilled employment. Program managers in this study highlighted the subtle differences in eligibility to access skilled programs. Access depended on a combination of factors such as language, experience, and appropriate educational background. Individuals who met these criteria were most likely to secure one of the limited spots in skilled employment programs. In practice, however, refugees were precluded while other immigrants progressed. Since achieving financial stability was a primary concern of refugees, some women resorted to taking up “survival jobs”, characterized by low pay and low skill, and others tried to improve their employability by taking up volunteer positions while their husbands were engaged in training or education. The women’s decision to support their husband’s career-related pursuits were in part related to their belief that men’s economic earning potential is higher (Banerjee and

Phan, 2015), which may not be surprising as the women were navigating a new economic context.

Refugees typically lack knowledge on the norms and practices of a host country until sufficient time has passed in their new environment. Among the women in our sample, most had been in Canada for 2 years. They often described struggling to comprehend basic career-seeking activities, such as booking an appointment with an employment counselor or applying for a job online. The women contrasted Canadian practices with their life ‘back home’ or ‘back in Syria’ where job seeking was much easier and not a formal process. Their new life in Canada also included changing gender roles. In particular, these women had often been responsible for domestic roles in the house (e.g. cooking, cleaning, childcare); however, since arriving in Canada, they were prompted to look for work due to financial reasons. These findings show how the women were sometimes willing and ready to adapt to new circumstances such as working around men but were not afforded the opportunity because of barriers including lack of paid work experience, transportation, and childcare. The women in this study were resilient, however, and saw their new economic landscape and associated barriers as a new venture to learn from and explore. This was seen in cases like Tasia, who had minimal prior work experience and was even teased by other Syrians in the community for wanting to start a small business. Tasia decided to ignore the women and instead act as an active agent in her settlement process, using entrepreneurship as a stepping stone to gain work experience while contributing to the economy (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013) and hoping to serve as an example to her young children.

The final pathway is one that combines the six levels of influence to showcase a common employment outcome experienced by many of the women – Employment in informal and feminized sectors:

As the women shuffled between their various roles (as wives, mothers, income earners), many sought support through settlement agencies to help in their job search. As described in Chapter 3, settlement agencies provide direct services to newcomers, including refugees, with some focusing specifically on employment (Shields and Praznik, 2018). The poor quality of these supports and services was a common criticism expressed by the women, partially because they felt misrepresented when settlement counselors matched some women to jobs for which they were overqualified, and when counsellors did not provide tailored assistance. Particularly, the women complained of misplaced priorities – how employment counselors, for instance, assumed the women knew where to look for jobs after designing a resume but did not provide support to help women address their multiple barriers (Garang, 2012) including language barriers, lack of transportation, and childcare challenges. Settlement staff themselves admitted to using some sort of checklist to address settlement needs, including employment, for all newcomers (immigrants and refugees) even though refugees required specialized attention. This one-size-fits-all model seems to be because these agencies are limited by governmental funding and so are unable to measure impact of their employment integration activities but, emphasize service delivery to reach as many newcomers as they can.

The tipping point came as unhelpful engagement with settlement agencies and labour market barriers including lack of language proficiency and work experience largely excluded the women from skilled employment programs and instead directed them toward social enterprise programs (e.g. cooking program). At the same time, availability of social support networks, the

women's gender role, and navigating a new economic context influenced the above relationship to shape their employment outcomes with many women settling in some sort of short-term career path whether or not the outcome was their preferred choice. These short-term career paths were typically feminized positions of cooking, tailoring, and arts and crafts within the informal economy. Most of the refugee women related feeling hopeful that pursuing informal opportunities could lead to better opportunities and help their families stabilize financially. This hopeful orientation is likely because migration offered refugee women safety from war and conflict, an element not typically experienced by other immigrant groups. Similar to immigrants, however, the loss of occupational status experienced by some refugee women was associated with a sense of inadequacy (Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009).

The proposed Employment Integration Framework provides an understanding of refugee women's employment influenced by six key conditions including labour market barriers, new economic context, gender, social support networks, settlement agency, and settlement stream. Feminist grounded perspectives further highlighted the congruencies between these conditions as the women negotiated their social locations. This approach posits understanding women's position as an interconnected network. Thus, in unpacking one category, you are understanding how it relates to others. Accordingly, this study describes how the aforementioned conditions intersect in multiple, dynamic and nonlinear pathways of 1) Government-assisted refugee and vulnerability; 2) Social support and inclusion; 3) Settlement agencies and barriers to employment access; and 4) Employment in feminized and informal sectors. These pathways extend extant research that often works within a single condition (Beiser, Johnson, & Turner, 1993; Tomlinson, 2010). For example, one pathway highlights how privately sponsored refugees often

arrive with language proficiency and social support networks but may not qualify for skilled programs offered by settlement agencies who may reserve these for other immigrants. The women may then sacrifice their career goals to allow their husbands to pursue training and education while they pursue informal entrepreneurial activities in cooking or tailoring to earn some income. As well, a feminist grounded theory approach is appropriate for this study given that the Employment Integration Framework emerged from the multiple dimensions and structures that shaped the women's lives (Wuest, 1995). Thus, this model provides a holistic picture rather than a reductionist lens.

6.4 Contributions

This dissertation offers a number of novel contributions. **First**, this research is timely given the current record high (nearly 5.5 million) of Syrian refugees fleeing from their homes due to war and fear of persecution. Estimates suggest that Canada is set to welcome nearly one million immigrants by 2020 of which roughly 10% will include refugees (Harris, Hall, Zimonjic, 2017). When guaranteed income supports cease following the one year since arrival, employment will become critical to a refugee's livelihood.

Second, with few exceptions (Beiser and Hou, 2006; Bevelander and Pendakur, 2012; Connor, 2010; Krahn et al., 2000; Lamba, 2008; Suto, 2009; Wilkinson, Garcea, and Bucklaschuk, 2015), research to date has homogenized the employment experiences of refugees with other immigrant categories and seldom differentiates by gender. As well, employment is often assessed secondary to other integration determinants such as access to healthcare or housing. This study, however, addresses employment integration exclusively within refugees with a particular focus on refugee women.

Third, in Canada, a gendered division of labour exists with refugee women occupying the highest proportion of low-skilled, low-waged positions in comparison to other immigrants

and Canadian-born workers (Hudon, 2015). Some research points to language barriers (Wilkinson and Garcea, 2017), lack of previous experience in the workforce (Kristyn and Hou, 2013), and high workloads in and outside the home (Stewart et al., 2015) as reasons for refugees' underemployment. This study complements this research but also extends to include broader circumstances including the role of settlement agencies, settlement stream, and social support.

Informed by preceding integration models, the Employment Integration Framework developed in this chapter focuses on employment as the predominant marker of integration and highlights the aforementioned circumstances. The proposed framework can be a useful tool for exploring how particular conditions interact leading to refugees marginalized position in the labour market. For instance, individuals with existing social support networks are better equipped to find employment. However, this relationship is also influenced by the settlement stream through which refugees arrived. As seen in Chapter 4, government-assisted refugees arrived with minimal if any social networks as many left behind members of their families (e.g. spouses and adult children) and had limited language proficiency when compared to other women. Settlement policy and programming can directly shape the types of employment programs refugees access dependent on these conditions. For those women with greater household responsibilities, for example, employment programs can gear the women toward precarious and informal positions that will allow a greater work-life balance while women with fewer familial roles may access skilled programs geared toward the formal economy if they meet program requirements.

Fifth, this research makes an important methodological contribution to the Canadian research landscape to describe employment-related challenges and conditions that preclude refugee women's access to safe and decent work. Much of this has been addressed quantitatively

to measure employment outcomes (Yu, Ouellet, and Warmington, 2007; Hudon, 2015; Wilkinson and Garcea, 2017), occupational health and safety (Smith and Mustard, 2010; Lay et al., 2018), and few with a particular focus on the Syrian cohort (IRCC, 2016). This research employed a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews with Syrian refugee women in Southern Ontario and individuals that work within the settlement sector to understand employment integration. Thus, in understanding the conditions impeding refugee women's employment, this study points to a number of areas that can be improved to facilitate employment integration and calls the attention of policymakers, governments, stakeholders, and community members to implement change.

Finally, in providing a gendered perspective on employment integration, this research contributes to feminist inquiries on women's work and social position. Specifically, a focus for feminist research over the past three or so decades has been on domestic labour, childcare provision in the home, and various forms of other work outside the labour market (Anderson, 2000; Gardiner, 1999; McDowell, 2014). Yet as more women move into the labour market, through choice or necessity, the conversation is shifting towards a new 'gender order' (McDowell, 2014) where new divisions such as pay gaps between women in different paid positions are considered. Along this new order, work on the connections between gender, immigrant status, and social context is valuable as more migrant women arrive in Canada and given the changing nature of work. This research in particular highlighted how government-assisted refugees, considered here as the most vulnerable, were often positioned within feminized sectors in the informal economy based on their conditions (e.g. lack of language skills, Canadian work experience, childcare responsibilities, social support network). Unpacking these

connections allows us to view gender *along* intersecting conditions versus the body of research that approached gendered labour through a single lens such as unpaid domestic work.

6.5 Implications for policy and practice

As seen through the dissertation findings, refugee women's employment is influenced by multiple conditions which included labour market barriers, new economic context, gender, social support networks, settlement agency, and settlement stream. Settlement programs offered through settlement agencies were found to be tailored to other types of immigrants and unable to provide equitable access to opportunities and resources that fit the unique needs of refugees (Ager and Strang, 2008). A focus on the policy and programming that shape their social and material context is needed.

6.5.1 Collaborative policies

Interviews with Syrian refugee women and key informants, namely employment counselors, suggested that settlement agencies have scattered agendas and are burdened with high workloads. This is intricately tied to funding constraints imposed by the federal government which promotes reach to newcomers over quality of programs. One option that was introduced in the late 1990s (only taken up by Manitoba and British Columbia) involved a devolved funding structure in which provinces are allotted a lump-sum of settlement funds with the assumption that they are better placed than the federal government to optimize service delivery and outcomes (Alexander, Burleton, & Fong, 2012). Our findings suggested that employment programs tailored to refugee needs are needed. This approach would give more decision making latitude to individuals working closely with refugee populations to provide the tailored employment-related services and supports.

An example of a federally-funded program is Canada's language instruction for newcomers to Canada (LINC). LINC classes are offered across the country to individuals with varying levels of language proficiency. However, uptake of classes is by individuals with the time and resources to attend. As seen in our findings, refugee women lacked access to transportation and childcare. Allowing community organizations to allocate funding toward in-house childcare, transit fare or other specific needs could help alleviate barriers and promote language instruction uptake among refugee women.

There is also a need for collaboration between community organizations, governments, and employers to provide safe and decent work to refugees. Some notable examples of organizations employing inter-collaboration include TRIEC, Immigrant Centre Manitoba, and the Edmonton Centre of Newcomers. TRIEC's mentorship program, for instance, helps match newcomers with employers, providing placements to orient a worker with a new job and addresses many barriers to navigating the Canadian labour market such as job interview preparation and academic and technical writing skills (TRIEC, 2006; Birrell and McIsaac, 2006). Such models can be combined with unique tools that capture a refugee's needs, concerns, and progress as seen with Ontario's Client Support Services (CSS) management database. CSS database is managed by settlement agencies and collects demographic information on refugees and provides details on their training, skills, and education. As well, barriers that impede integration are also noted. For example, preliminary data collected from CSS found lack of affordable childcare was as a common barrier to accessing employment reported by government-assisted refugees (Korn and Raphael, 2016). A tool similar to CSS would not only provide employers with access to a pool of workers with information on their respective skills and

background but details on barriers (e.g. childcare challenges) that can potentially be addressed by interested employers.

6.5.2 Inclusive integration policy

Public attitudes toward refugees can affect refugees' ability to integrate and willingness of organizations to implement initiatives that meet their needs (Hynie, 2018). When newcomer women arrive to Canada, they are typically classified as "dependent" to the man as either a daughter, wife or sister (Grieco and Boyd, 2004). Entering as dependents may establish a public opinion of inferiority and enforce an idea of refugee women as homemakers rather than participants in the labour market. Thus, changes in how refugee women are characterized in the admittance process can shape their identity and should be considered for a more inclusive integration policy.

Public perception is also shaped by media outlets. Here, refugees are often portrayed as helpless victims, which albeit support resettlement efforts (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner, 2016), however, this perception may persist after resettlement and undermine a refugee's employability. As well, some outlets associate refugees with fear of terrorism, crime and violence (McDonald, 2017). This framing of refugees as criminals facilitates dehumanization (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014) resulting in less support for resettlement (Esses, Veenvliet, and Medianu, 2012). Promoting social connections can encourage less stigmatized perceptions of refugees (Hynie, 2018) and has been suggested as a way to move the discourse away from helplessness. For instance, the Natural Helpers initiative in Daytona is a prime example of how social connectedness changed the narrative to view each individual as an equal and valuable part of the community (Lamping, Bertolo, & Wahrab, 2018). Particularly, Natural Helpers (migrant members who were helping newcomers) worked intimately with settlement

agencies and newcomers as stakeholders to navigate integration concerns. This allowed the community to move away from the “fix-it frame” (a one-stop-shop for newcomers to access assistance) to one that centered on community relationships and recognition of all parties (Lamping, Bertolo, & Wahlrab, 2018). Scaling this and similar models in the Canadian context could prove promising, creating a welcoming and equitable climate for refugee women.

6.6 Strengths and Limitations

Methodological limitations exist in any study design. Particular limitations of this study are related to the sample and recruitment, use of an informal interpreter, and theoretical positioning. First, the population of interest in this study was Syrian refugee woman, chosen due to their large recent influx to Canada as well as their unique psychosocial profile (e.g. exposure to Syrian civil war, time in neighbouring countries such as Turkey or Lebanon) which allowed us to maintain analytic focus. Results from the study may therefore be limited in terms of transferability to other refugee populations. However, findings about potential policy and programming impacts are still broadly relevant as other refugee women may encounter the same systemic barriers and/or challenges to employment integration.

Recruitment took place in the Greater Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo region primarily because of our partnerships with settlement agencies and non-profit organizations in these areas. Recruitment in other metropolitan areas may have provided access to a more diverse sample (e.g. linguistically) with different resources at their disposal given provincial differences in policy and programming. However, Southern Ontario resettled the largest number of Syrian refugees (Houle, 2019) and thus was deemed a suitable place for recruitment.

A second limitation of the study design was the use of an informal interpreter during the interviews with Arabic-speaking refugee women. The use of interpreters without training in

qualitative feminist research has been criticized for issues arising from language, culture, and power (Berman & Tyyskä, 2011). Some studies suggest that in the interpretation context more is being said than translated and, interpreters may leave out content they feel is unimportant or irrelevant to the study (see, for example, Aranguri, Davidson, & Ramirez, 2006). Thus, a critical step recommended by Temple (1997) is briefing before the interview and debriefing between the researcher and interpreter following each interview to go over different meanings as well as the interpreter's perspective on the research and translation. Due to time constraints and the interpreter's busy work schedule, limited debriefing occurred, therefore, it is difficult to determine how much omission influenced our understanding of the data (Berman & Tyyskä, 2011). Further, in this research, we trusted that the Syrian interpreter we recruited was from the same ethno-cultural group as the refugee women and could assert cultural sameness (Edwards, 1998). However, we should not have assumed that sharing the same language with the refugee women represents the same culture given the degree of diversity within ethnic groups. As Shklarov (2007) points out, interpreters are often long time immigrants who have been educated or worked in the Western context for a long period of time, which could make them culturally distant, to some extent, from their counterparts. The interpreter in this study, had been in Canada for 10 years, was from Syria, and worked exclusively with Syrian newcomers and so was likely an appropriate choice for this cross-cultural study although this was difficult to ascertain conclusively. Finally, the interpreter's role throughout the research process was not adequately considered which could raise issues of power and authority. Edwards (1998) recommends some sort of training to match research knowledge of the interpreter and researcher however, we were limited by time and resources. Instead, some level of responsibility with respect to recruiting women was given to the interpreter. Specifically, the interpreter referred refugee women she was

working with at the settlement agency as potential participants. The interpreter was only involved in supporting recruitment and interpreting; final authority on sampling and analysis was the principle researcher.

A third and final limitation related to theoretical positioning. This study employed a feminist grounded theory approach to inform study design and analysis. While this approach has been used in a wide range of academic and professional fields (for a review, see Olesen, 2005) its use in public health is limited. However, this theoretical positioning was chosen given its emphasis on the rights of women. Feminist grounded theory reflects a view that values women and that confronts systemic injustices based on gender (Chinn and Wheeler, 1985).

One assumption of this approach is that women's oppression is produced at the intersections of social, political, economic, ethnic, and cultural contexts. As Flax (1999) explains "oppression is seen as a part of the way the world is structured. The structure is the patriarchy" and one goal is to understand power differentials to bring about social change. While this approach allowed the dissertation to uncover various conditions influencing employment integration, its emphasis on power dynamics can be seen as a limitation. Particularly, framing of the study around oppression may have inadvertently led to discourse around inequality or a hyperawareness toward the women's disadvantage upon arrival.

Reflexivity, however, was employed throughout the interviews to promote reflection and trustworthiness of the knowledge creation between myself and the women. Particularly, reflexivity allowed for examination of analytic issues, researcher influence on the research, and reflections on researcher's own feelings (Olesen, 2007). In this sense, reflexivity involves bracketing preconceived notions, as potentially evidenced from the dissertation framing, to

critically incorporate the women's voices to understand employment integration from their perspective.

Strengths outweigh limitations in this study. This study addressed numerous gaps in the literature and can inform policy and programming that may safely integrate refugees into the labour market. First, this work differentiated refugees from other categories of immigrants and further applied a gender lens to explore women's experiences. To date, there has been limited investigation of the intersections of immigrant status, gender, and work in Canada, since many studies have focused on employment as a subset of settlement issues affecting immigrants broadly. Secondly, this dissertation provides a comprehensive portrait of conditions that shape refugee women's employment. Particularly, labour market barriers, social support networks, economic context, gender, settlement agency and settlement stream were explored, including how they interacted and whether they transcended across the employment integration experience.

This study was strengthened by a qualitative research design grounded in in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both Syrian refugee women and key informants. The women were included if having arrived from any of the refugee protection programs in Canada. As well, refugee women were recruited using a variety of recruitment tools including social media, posted fliers, through institutional ties/contacts, which together, provided access to a diverse sample of women with a range of experiences and supports to integrate socially and economically. Many studies exclude participants who are unable to communicate in English (Brodeur et al., 2017; Murray and Buller, 2007) but this study included Arabic-speaking women through the use of an informal interpreter. With respect to recruitment, we worked with members in the community to recruit women who experienced language barriers and posted fliers and ads that were translated to Arabic. The inclusion of key informants further supplemented interviews with the women and

provided a unique perspective that contributed to a broad understanding of the research topic and triangulation of data sources, a tenet of qualitative rigor. In addition, the iterative back and forth process between data collection and analysis in conjunction with the research team enhanced trustworthiness of the data and allowed us to inform the interview schedule and broaden the sample, if needed.

Finally, this dissertation offers a timely examination of refugee women's employment integration in Canada, which is particularly needed given the current refugee crisis and sociopolitical climate. In particular, the United States has started to reduce immigration acceptance under the Trump administration, and this decline may place pressure on other refugee accepting OECD countries, including Canada. Thus, economic integration will be a considerable concern and findings from this study represent important data to support effective change.

6.7 Directions for future research

This dissertation sought to explore Syrian refugee women's employment integration experiences in Canada. While this study provided an understanding of the underlying context and conditions that influenced the women's access to employment, further research is needed to build upon the findings of this study. In particular, investigations of refugee women's long-term employment trajectories and policy and programming to promote employment integration is needed. Further, there are unique opportunities within collected datasets on Canadian immigration to complement and extend this research.

There is a need to better understand refugee women's long-term employment patterns in Canada, including what jobs they secure, how they secure jobs, and their employment goals. The majority of research on refugee employment has relied on census data, which are somewhat dated. For instance, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), which concluded

data collection in 2004, found that two-years post-settlement, refugees' employment rate was 44% in comparison to 72% for economic immigrants (Xue, 2006). As well, over one half of economic immigrants were working in occupations relating to their education while job-to-education mismatch was highest among refugees (Xue, 2006). Expanding on the LSIC, the Western Canadian Settlement survey, differentiated the types of work refugees arriving between 2008 and 2012 secured when compared to other immigrants. Particularly, refugees were more prone to take on precarious employment positions (part-time, temporary, or short-term contract) while economic immigrants secured permanent positions (Esses et al., 2013). Finally, early evidence on the Syrian cohort suggests that 52% of privately sponsored and a mere 9.7% of government-assisted refugees were able to find work, albeit in sales and service industries (IRCC, 2016). While these data provide a glimpse of employment outcomes, longitudinal data and continued follow-up is needed to understand refugees' occupational mobility as length of stay in Canada increases.

Opportunities do exist within Canadian datasets to assess longitudinal outcomes however many of these surveys do not differentiate immigrant categories. The Canadian Labour Force Survey (LFS), for instance, is a monthly survey which measures the current state of the Canadian labour market and is used to make important decisions regarding job creation, education, and training. The LFS asks respondents to identify as landed immigrants or Canadian-born workers. If the survey expanded its questions to include refugees and the different refugee categories, it could provide data on changes in refugee employment over time. Studies employing a qualitative design, similar this study, but extending to follow refugees through time (e.g. 5-year follow-up) would also be appropriate and provide a rich understanding of their employment longitudinally.

Further examination of the settlement service environment, particularly in the context of programming, could also be considered in future research. As seen in Chapter 3, settlement agencies are the first stop for many newcomers to access immediate and long-term concerns which includes employment-related help. However, much of the existing research on settlement agencies focus on issues of outreach and budgetary constraints that may diminish quality of service. Given the role settlement agencies play in referring refugees to employment-related programs and employers in the community, there is a need for more in-depth evaluations of settlement agency program outcomes and their key actors including employment counselors and program managers to develop a sense of what is working and areas that can be improved on to facilitate employment integration.

This study explored employment integration from the perspective of refugee women, many of whom described their children as the future and their central priority. The women often took on low paying jobs or sacrificed their education and training to invest in their children's well-being and success. Studies to date have shown that children of refugee parents prosper when they are born and raised in Canada (Hou, 2017; Pendakur, 2017) but the situation of foreign born children is less known. Given that a large proportion of arriving Syrians and many other refugee groups are under the age of 18, it would be interesting to see whether their employment prospects improve over time, in comparison to parents.

There is also the need for research to examine employment integration along the spectrum of federal and provincial policy changes to immigration that may support or hinder integration. For instance, the federal government plans to develop and implement a Pan-Canadian Language Strategy to improve coordination of language programming in areas of employment-related language training aligned with local labour market needs (IRCC, 2018).

Meanwhile, if the Conservative party regains government, changes will be seen in categories of admitted immigrants. Particularly, their immigration system may favour economic immigrants over refugees (Smith and Turner, 2019). Research that follows these changes would likely highlight the changing landscape of immigration and point to areas that need improvement.

This study provided evidence that contexts outside labour market barriers (e.g. gender role, settlement stream) are important conditions that influence refugee women's employment outcomes. Future research should explore the different pathways and mechanisms through which these conditions interact outside of those discussed in this study. For example, it would be interesting to identify the labour market attitudes of home countries and whether this interacts with gender roles to shape employment of women. Understanding these pathways are key to developing recommendations for policy and programming as seen throughout the manuscripts and further underlined in section 6.5.

The Canadian immigration climate provides a unique opportunity to study integration in varying refugee populations and settlement streams. Canada is home to a diverse group of refugees from across the globe. Between 2015 and 2016, after Syria, refugees arrived mostly from Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Houle, 2019). This study could serve as a model for future investigations on refugees belonging to different ethnic groups, arriving through one or multiple streams, and in other jurisdictions. For example, future research could compare and contrast employment outcomes by source country and explore whether conditions (e.g. language proficiency, previous experience) are similar or not. Such examinations would broaden analytic focus and provide a nuanced portrait of Canada's refugee composition and economic adaptation.

Lastly, it is important to note that only 5 to 10 per cent of Syrian refugees were able to resettle in developed countries while the remaining are displaced in neighbouring developing countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan) (Betts and Collier, 2017). The small fraction resettled in countries like Canada have more favourable circumstances (income supports, social services, etc.) while the majority live in impoverished conditions and rely on humanitarian aids. A call to international scholars to explore the settlement experiences of these refugees in developing countries is therefore needed to create a humanitarian approach that is inclusive of all refugees and builds an international agenda that incorporates jobs and restores autonomy in this marginalized population (Betts and Collier, 2017).

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Chapter 1

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Appendix A: Syrian refugee woman information and consent form

How do Syrian refugee women seek and find work? A feminist grounded analysis of work integration experiences in Canada

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Waterloo. The purpose of the study is to understand your experience of searching for a job or securing a job since coming to Canada as a refugee.

If you decide to take part in the study, you will need to be available for an interview of up to one hour, conducted in person at a time and location that is easy for you. You do not need to prepare for this interview, it will be like a conversation and you can choose what to share with us. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to stop answering the questions or leave the interview all together by letting the research know. Further, if you choose to leave the study after interviews are already completed, it is your decision whether to keep your interview data as part of the study.

Data collected during this study will be kept for up to 7 years in Dr. Ellen MacEachen's locked office. Only the research team will have access. Any personal identifying information will be replaced with a false name or generic information however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. There are no known or anticipated risks from participating in this study.

To thank you for your time and commitment, we will offer you a payment of \$25. The amount received is taxable and it is your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes.

The final decision to take part in the study is yours. You will be provided with anonymity. That is, the person who mentioned you to us will not be provided with any information about who was actually a part of the study and what is said in interviews. Further, when we present results of the research, we will not release your name or any information that could identify you.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

If you are interested in participating or have any additional questions, please contact me at 519-888-4567 ext. 37248 or by email at ssenthanar@uwaterloo.ca.

Sincerely,

Sonja Senthanar



CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Sonja Senthana and Ellen MacEachen at the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics. at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Key informant information and consent form

Our study will explore the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women in Canada. We are conducting interviews with key informants about their views on employment of newcomers, specifically among refugees, as well as your interpretation and application of current policy, programming, and practices to promote employment integration of refugees. We are also interviewing Syrian refugee women about their experiences of securing employment since arrival and any impacts on family and traditional roles and health and well-being.

Our interviews with key informants such as employment counsellors, life skill coaches, and case managers will focus on the functioning of programming and practices to assist in resettlement issues. This study is part of a doctoral thesis led by student research Sonja Senthana and supervisor Dr. Ellen MacEachen.

Participation in this study involves being available for an interview of up to one hour, conducted in person at a mutually agreed upon location (such as your office). There is no need to prepare for this interview as it will be like a conversation and you can choose what to share with us. During the interview, you may decline to answer any questions and you can withdraw at any time by advising the researcher. Further, if you withdraw from the study after interviews are completed, it is your decision whether to withdraw or keep your interview data as part of the study. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Data collected during this study will be retained for up to 7 years in Dr. Ellen MacEachen's locked office. Only the research team will have access. Any personal identifying information will be replaced with a pseudonym or generic information however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used.

We do not anticipate any negative risks from your participation in this study. We want to assure you that we take great care to preserve anonymity. Everything you tell us will be confidential and when we present results of the research, we will not release your name or any information that could identify you. If you are participating as a spokesperson for your organization, it is possible that your organization may be identified, but your identity as an individual will not.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision to participate is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca. We hope that the results of our study will provide societal benefit by identifying ways to improve refugee resettlement.

If you are interested in participating or have any additional questions, please contact me at 519-888-4567 ext. 37248 or by email at ssenthana@uwaterloo.ca.

Sincerely,

Sonja Senthana

CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Sonja Senthana and Ellen MacEachen at the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics. at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Participant feedback letter

[insert date]

Dear [insert name],

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study, “How do Syrian refugee women seek and find work? A feminist grounded analysis of work integration experiences in Canada”. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to explore the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women and any impact on other facets of life such as family roles, power dynamics, and health and well-being. It also examines the views of key informants on these issues. This will be one of the first studies to assess the intersections of immigrant status, gender, work, and health in our current sociopolitical context.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data has been collected and analyzed, I plan on sharing the findings with the research community through conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of the study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact Sonja Senthonar at the phone or email address provided below. If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing your email address.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

Sincerely,

Sonja Senthonar

School of Public Health and Health Systems

Telephone number: [insert phone number]

Email address: ssenthonar@uwaterloo.ca



Appendix D: Syrian refugee women interview schedule

I am interested in your experience of entering the labour market since arriving in Canada as a new refugee. There is some literature on how other immigrant classes integrate but there is not much out there on refugees in particular and almost nothing on refugee women. Over the next hour or so, I will go through some open-ended questions to learn more about your experience, for instance, some of the challenges you've faced and recommendations for improvement. Feel free to stop me at any point if you have any questions or need further clarifications. Consider this a conversation, we can go in any direction you please.

1. Can you tell me a bit about your family situation?
 - a. Are you married? Have any children or other dependents living with you?
 - b. If you have a partner, does he/she work?
 - c. How has your family role been affected since arriving in Canada?
2. In Syria, were you engaged in paid work?
 - a. If yes, were you formally educated for this work? If not, can you tell me some of the reasons why you were not working?
 - b. Who else in your family was working? Was this income enough to support your needs?
 - c. What was your typical day like? How are the household affairs managed? If by you, can you tell me a bit about how you balance these responsibilities with work?
 - d. Who is considered the breadwinner or primary income earner in your family?
3. Please tell me about your experience finding work in Canada since arriving?
 - a. Is it different from what you are used to doing? If so, in what way?
 - b. Do you have any contacts helping you?
 - c. If you weren't able to find work, can you tell me about your experience of searching for work but not being able to secure it?
 - d. Could you describe your experience in finding work in comparison to men? Does that affect your approach to searching for work?
 - e. How about the influence of your community or culture?
4. Can you tell me about some of the challenges you've encountered in trying to secure employment?
 - a. What are some of the tough parts? Employers, credentials, language?
 - b. Can you tell me a bit about if and how you were able to overcome these obstacles?
5. Dependent on resettlement stream: Can you tell me about some of the financial or social supports you've received since arriving in Canada? By supports, I mean any income, emotional support or help from family, friends, or community members as well as help from resettlement agencies.
 - a. Do you think these supports are helpful in helping you integrate? If so, in what way? If not, why?

- b. How about any programs, do you participate in any programs offered (this can include employment or community programs)? Can you tell me a bit about these programs? Do you feel they have been helpful in terms of gaining employment?
- 6. How would you describe your current health situation?
 - a. Has your health declined since coming here? If so, in what way?
- 7. In an ideal world, how would you improve the employment integration process? Who do you think needs to make these changes? Why these changes?

Appendix E: Key informant interview schedule

The overall aim of this study is to explore the employment integration experiences of Syrian refugee women in Canada. Specifically, we would like to understand newcomer experience in securing employment, challenges in finding and securing work, and how working or lack of work has affected other aspects of life such as family role, power dynamics, and health and well-being. Our focus here is to explore your views, as individuals that work closely with refugees on resettlement, on labour market integration of refugees and, in particular, refugee women and whether current policy, programming, and practices facilitate employment integration.

1. Please tell me about your organization, your role/background, and how long you have been there.
2. What is your knowledge and experience of refugee resettlement policy and programming? What are some practices that work well and not well at your organization?
3. Turning to refugee women, what's been your experience in trying to help them resettle and find employment? Are there any extra challenges in comparison to refugee males? Other immigrant categories?
 - a. Can you describe the types of employment offered to refugees and refugee women?
 - b. In your opinion, what is the viability of feminized positions (e.g. catering, tailoring) in the Canadian labour market?
4. Can you describe some of the practices and policies that facilitate uptake of employment by refugee women? Probe for: shortcomings of some of the programming in place
5. Can you tell me a bit about any other facets of a refugee woman's life that might interfere with employment integration? Probe for: family life, domestic roles, spousal support/non-support, resources such as friends, family, transportation
6. What expectations does your organization have in relation to employment of refugees and refugee women? Probe for: whether they follow-up once jobs are secured, their long-term trajectory in the labour market
7. In an ideal world, what recommendations would you suggest to improve employment integration of refugee women? Why these changes?